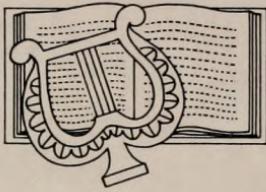


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In Memoriam

Ruth Candler Lovett

1935-1964



CRICHTON.

BY W. HARRISON AINSWORTH, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF "ROOKWOOD."

Ergo, flos juvenum, Scotiæ spes, Palladis ingens,
Ereptumque decus Musarum e dulcibus ulnis,
Te, quamvis sileant alii, Crichtone, poetæ,
Teque, tuamque necem nunquam mea Musa silebit.

ABERNETHY. *Musa Campestris.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THOMAS CURSON HANSARD, PATERNOSTER-ROW.

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CRICHTON.

Epoch the First.

The Second Day—CONTINUED.

THE SECOND DAY.

(CONTINUED.)

CHAPTER V.

THE PAVILION.

La Reine vouloit persuader que ce pauvre Prince, son fils, avoit conspiré, afin de le rendre odieux à chacun.

HENRI ETIENNE. *Discours Merveilleux.*

WHEN the armourer had completed his office, and Crichton, attired in a magnificent suit of russet-coloured mail sent to him by the Vicomte de Joyeuse, was about to place his plumed bourginot upon his brow and return to the tilt-yard, a page in the royal livery suddenly appeared at the entrance of the

pavilion, and announced the Queen-Mother. Ere the Scot could recover from the astonishment into which he was thrown by this unlooked-for visit, Catherine stood before him.

“ Our presence occasions you surprise, we perceive, messire,” said the Queen, with a gracious salutation, which Crichton haughtily returned ; “ nor will that surprise be diminished when you learn the motive that has brought us hither.”

“ To whatever motive I must attribute your Majesty’s present condescension,” returned Crichton coldly, “ I am well aware, from your *smiles*, that some new danger is to be apprehended.”

“ You wrong us by your doubts, Chevalier Crichton,” rejoined Catherine, in a tone of great courtesy, and apparent candour ; “ our enmity exists no longer. In vanquishing Gonzaga you have vanquished us. We are here to acknowledge our defeat ; and we are assured that your nature is too chivalrous to refuse mercy to a prostrate foe.”

“ Your Majesty forgets our interview last night,” said Crichton, regarding the Queen with a distrustful glance—“ and the Machiavelian precepts with which you unintentionally favoured me. Need I remind you that ‘ words are the cloak ’neath which the *sword* is hidden ;’ need I add, that under your present fair professions, I discern a dark and deadly purpose. Your Majesty is no prostrate foe. And it is for me—not for yourself to sue for clemency.”

“ You have nothing more to apprehend from us, messire,” said Catherine, a slight shade passing across her majestic features, “ unless, indeed, you wantonly provoke our resentment. We pledge our royal word, that we are come hither to confer with you in amity.”

“ That royal word was plighted to the brave and trusting Coligni,” rejoined Crichton; “ how it was kept, the gory gibbet of Montfaucon best can answer.”

“ Grant us patience, heaven !” exclaimed

Catherine, in an altered voice—"you will not then accept our assurance of friendship?"

"No, by the Saint-Barthélemy, Madame," answered Crichton sternly.

Catherine's quivering lip proclaimed the struggle she underwent to repress her almost-uncontrollable indignation. Skill'd, however, in the mastery of her emotions, she did instantaneously repress it; and waving her hand to the attendants, who had withdrawn to the outlet of the tent at her approach, she was left alone with the Scot.

"Chevalier Crichton," said she in a deep low tone, "you are brave—but your bravery amounts to folly. Of what avail are these idle taunts?—We understand each other."

"We do, Madame," replied the Scot.

"And with this understanding, why should we not act in unison? Our interests require it. As friend or foe our purposes are so indissolubly connected, that to separate one were to destroy the other. So far you have

succeeded. You are in a position to make terms with us. Propose them. Let not your ambition dread too high a flight. You have boasted that your ancestry is noble—regal—”

“ The blood of the Stuart flows in my veins,” said Crichton proudly.

“ If I have heard aright, your sire is—”

“ Sir Robert Crichton, my father, is sole Advocate to James of Scotland,” interrupted Crichton, “ our religious opinions are at variance, or I had never quitted my native land.”

“ You did ill to leave it in its season of calamity” said Catherine, “ a prey to heresy and rebellion. One hand like your’s ; one voice potent as your own might have availed to check, if not avert, this widely-devastating storm. Your energies would, indeed, have been beneficially displayed in crushing that serpent brood, which the pernicious zeal of the fanatic Knox hath called into life. Had the tocsin of Saint-Barthelemy

been rung from the towers of Edinburgh ; had our gentle daughter Mary dealt with her ruthless foes, as we have dealt with the enemies of our faith, she would not now have been a captive to Elizabeth. Chevalier Crichton, your lovely Queen weeps away her hours in prison. It should have been your aim, as faithful Catholic, and loyal subject, to have effected her liberation."

" You have, unwittingly, touched upon a chord that vibrates through my heart, Madame," said the Scot, his colour mounting, and his glances kindling as he spoke. " To rescue my beloved Queen from her oppressors, I would willingly lay down my life—nay, a thousand lives if I possessed them ! If her guard were thrice in number what it is,—her prison yet more inaccessible,—if she were lodged within the palace of her rival—or immured in London's impregnable Tower, I would accomplish her deliverance, or perish in the attempt—did not an awful bar prevent me."

“ What bar?” demanded Catherine, with some appearance of curiosity.

“ A father’s malediction!” replied Crichton, with a sudden change of tone. “ Your majesty hath spoken of the devastation, which heresy has spread throughout my unhappy land. Her temples have been desecrated—the fire that burnt upon her ancient altars has been extinguished; her reverend priests have been driven forth—but this is not all. Into the bosom of her families these new doctrines have brought fierce and bitter dissension. Irreconcileable hatred has sprung up where love before existed. My sire (alas! that it should be so) has embraced the Reformed Faith. I have remained constant to the creed of my ancestry — to the creed of my conviction: and in behalf of that religion—in the cause of my injured Queen I should have taken up arms, when I was of years to bear them, had not my sire placed between my sword and the hand that would have grasped it—*his curse!* With a father’s

malediction hanging over my head, I could not hope for success. Without a struggle I resigned the first, the dearest wish of my dawning life. In vain were prospects of ambition, clouded with heresy, and stained by rebellion, opened to me. In vain were proffers made me by those who would have purchased my services. I left my country, for whose weal I would have gladly bled—I quitted my paternal halls, to which a thousand tender recollections bound me;—I vowed never to return to that country—never again to behold that home, till the schism of the one should be annihilated—the old rites of worship, once observed by the other, restored.”

“ You will never then see Scotland more,” said Catherine, “ she will cling to her false faith, as a libertine to the leman whose arts have ensnared him.”

“ Or, as her preachers affirm,” rejoined Crichton, in a tone of scorn; “ she is like the profligate who hath abandoned the mistress,

and assumed the wife. Your Majesty is right. Scotland will know no change. The homely creed she hath adopted suits her homely people well. Austere in feeling as in manner, they will become hardened in heresy. The dogma promulgated by Knox - *plebis est religionem reformare* roused the whole nation. The people *have* reformed their faith—and their creed is essentially plebeian. Stripped of its ornaments ; robbed of its majesty and grace ; its magnificent proportions, sculptured and reared by ages, destroyed ; its venerable and hoary colouring, which time alone could impart, effaced ; its odours scattered to the breezes ; its traditions forgotten or despised ; the worship of my country simple, naked, and, it may be, pure, no more resembles its ancient grandeur and sublimity, than the lowly temple of the Huguenot will bear comparison with the glorious edifice of Nôtre-Dame. A cathedral *is* religion. Who can enter its reverend aisles unmoved—who can gaze upwards to its storied roof with

thoughts that stray not heaven-ward ! Mine be the antique fane—mine the time-honoured creed. Mine be the saint, the shrine, the solemn, and melodious mass — mine the faith picturesque, poetical, beautiful. My native land I may never behold again—my father's blessing I may never receive—but the religion of Rome, entwined around my heart, endeared to me even by persecution, I will ever maintain."

" I applaud your zeal, messire," said Catherine. " To the brave man, the soil he treads is his country. Be France the land of your adoption. Her faith is yet unchanged. Heaven grant it may continue so ! The storm we have swept away, is again gathering with increased power and fury. Lend us your assistance to dispel it—to uphold the religion so dear to you. In the reign of the Seventh Charles, who swayed the sceptre of this fair kingdom, one of your countrymen was, for his bravery, displayed in the well-fought field of Beaugé, in Anjou, when the royal Clarence

fell by his hand, created Constable of France —why should not like dignity be yours?"

" Were such unhop'd-for distinction mine, Madame," said Crichton, smiling, " I should not be the first of my line who hath been similarly graced. The valiant Earl of Buchan, the countryman to whom your Majesty refers, by whose proud achievement the field of Beaugé was won, and by whom the baton of France was thenceforth borne, was (I hesitate not to proclaim it) my ancestor."

" Indeed!" exclaimed the wily queen, with well-feigned surprise. " Valour it seems is your inheritance. We rejoice to learn that you are a descendant of bold John of Buchan, whose chivalrous deeds our consort Henri II., hath so often rehearsed to us. Why, we again ask, should you not tread in the steps of your ancestor? Why should not your hand grasp the marshal's baton? Why should not your voice lead on the chivalry of France to conquest? Why should not your vigilance maintain her ancient faith unsullied?"

Crichton returned no answer. His countenance glowed and his frame dilated, as Catherine, not insensible of the impression she had produced, continued:—

“ Why should you not aspire to the hand of the fairest Princess of her time? Why should not the lovely Esclairmonde be yours?”

“ No more, I pray you, Madame—tempt me not.”

“ Graced with the rank of marshal—allied to the royal house of Condé—enriched with the dowry which your bride will bring—would not even *your* ambition be contented?”

“ Even in my wildest dreams my aspirations never soared so high,” ejaculated Crichton—“ A marshal of France!”

“ Her leader!” said Catherine.

“ That baton in my grasp which Bertrand Du Guesclin, Olivier de Clisson, and the brave Boucicaut bore — which Gaston de Foix, Brissac, and Montmorency wielded—that baton mine!”

“ The legions of France beneath your command,” added Catherine.

“ Her legions!” echoed Crichton—“ ha ! Saint Andrew ! I see them rise around me ! I see her fierce and fiery bands pour like a tide upon the plain. I see her chivalry arrayed before me—that peerless chivalry which Bayard led—ha ! Montjoie ! Saint-Denis—methinks I hear their battle-cry.”

“ Be Bayard’s fortune your’s.”

“ Bayard was reproachless, Madame,” returned the Scot, the glow which had lighted up his features suddenly fading away, “ the name of Crichton shall be equally so.”

“ Your name shall not be stained, mes-sire,” said Catherine impatiently ;—“ but in your dreams of ambition you have forgotten—what we should least have expected you to forget—your tenderer aspirations.”

“ Esclairmonde !” exclaimed Crichton.

“ Say rather the Princess of Condé,” re-

joined Catherine, “ for her rank will speedily be acknowledged.”

“ Will *you* acknowledge it, Madame ? ” demanded Crichton eagerly.

“ At our own pleasure,” returned the Queen coldly. “ Question us not — but listen. The baton of France—the hand of the Princess of Condé are your’s—on certain conditions.”

“ Hell hath her compacts,” muttered Crichton ; “ and men have bartered their eternal weal for lighter offers. Your conditions, Madame ? ”

“ Have we your knightly word, that whether or not you accept the terms we are about to propose, your lips shall reveal no syllable we may utter ? ”

Crichton appeared lost in reflection.

“ Have we your word ? ” repeated Catherine.

“ You have, Madame,” returned the Scot.

“ We trust you with our life then—for we

are well assured, that once plighted you will not break that word."

"Your Majesty may speak, as to your confessor—"

"Our confessor!" echoed Catherine desirously: "Think you we would intrust a secret,—the betrayal of which would fill our city of Paris with scaffolds,—would float her streets with blood,—would crowd the dungeons of her Bastille, and the oubliettes of her Châtelets, with noble prisoners, to a crafty priest. No! there are secrets which must not even be breathed to heaven. Our's is one of them."

"And crimes too deep to be forgiven," said Crichton gloomily.—"Heaven grant your Majesty propose not such."

"Be patient, messire," returned the Queen, "and you shall hear what we *do* propose. You are already (no matter how!) in possession of our plans. We need not, therefore, tell you of our project for Henri's dethronement—

of our scheme to place his crown upon the Duc D'Anjou's head."

"Thus much I know, Madame," said Crichton.

"But you are not aware," continued Catherine, approaching more nearly to the Scot, and lowering her tone, "that Anjou is now in Paris."

"Within this city?—ha!"

"Within the Louvre—with in the palace soon to be his own."

"Great heaven!"

"Bussy D'Amboise, his favourite, hath this morn arrived from Flanders. All goes well for us. We have the gold of Spain—the swords of Switzerland and Scotland—for the guards are *ours*. Our thousand agents, our spies and emissaries are at work. They thread each quarter of the city. Our partisans collect together; and only await the signal to declare themselves. That signal will be given to night."

“ So soon !”

“ Ay, so soon,” reiterated Catherine triumphantly. “ Nostradamus foretold that *all* our sons should be kings. To-morrow his prediction will be verified.”

“ And Henri ?”

Catherine grew pale as death and trembled so violently, that she was compelled to lay her hand for support upon Crichton’s armed shoulder.

“ What of the King your son, Madame ?” continued the Scot sternly.

“ Of all our sons,” exclaimed the Queen, with a look of deep agony, and it might be, compunction, “ Henri hath ever been the most dear to us. The sickly Fran^cois, the rugged Charles found no place in our heart. But Henri, the fond, the pliant, the winning; Henri ever devoted, ever deferential to our will; Henri the graceful, the polished, the beautiful—whom nature intended for a king, and for whom we have seconded nature’s intentions,—he hath ever been our favourite.”

“ And you will now destroy your own work ; you will sacrifice your favourite son.”

“ Our safety requires it,” returned Catherine, sighing deeply ; “ Henri hath of late grown wayward and capricious. He refuses to follow our counsels— to acknowledge our sway. His minions have supplanted us in his esteem. Saint-Luc, Joyeuse, and D’Épernon rule where we were wont to govern. The Salic law prevents the exercise of sovereign authority in our own person. We reign *through* our sons : if not through Henri, we must reign through François.”

“ Weighed against love of power, a mother’s love is nothing,” said Crichton.

“ Against high resolves it *should* be nothing,” returned Catherine ; “ against Fate it *is* nothing. Of what avail is our tenderness for Henri ; of what avail are our regrets for his defection ; of what avail is this hesitation to pronounce his doom ? Chevalier Crichton,” continued she, in a voice that froze the

Scot's blood within his veins, "he must die!"

There was a terrible pause, during which each regarded the other fixedly.

"Horror!" exclaimed Crichton, at length recovering his speech, "can *a mother* say this?"

"Hear me!" cried Catherine, "and learn with whom thou hast to deal—learn and tremble! By blood—my own blood was my power obtained; by blood—my own blood must it be maintained. Henri must die."

"By the hand that reared him?"

"No! mine might falter. I will find a surer arm to deal the blow. Listen," continued she, becoming perfectly calm, "by midnight all will be in readiness. Under various pretexts, and in various disguises, the leaders of Anjou's faction will, ere that hour arrives, have been introduced into the Louvre. Bussy D'Amboise hath his own quarrel to avenge upon the king's favourites. His sword hath seldom failed him. He will deal with

Joyeuse, D'Épernon, and Saint-Luc. The Duc de Nevers is ours already. Villequier and D'O are vanes that will shift with the wind. Henri alone remains—and he—”

“ Well ! Madame.”

“ Is reserved for your hand.”

“ For MINE ! ”

“ We have prevailed upon him to defer the grand chivalrous emprise in which he takes part till midnight. Amid the conflict his lance will seek yours. Couch then your sharpened spear,—cry “ Live François III,” and strike ! We know too well the force of your arm to doubt the fatal issue of the blow. That cry—that deadly stroke will be the signal to Anjou—and to our party. They will respond to it. Henri's adherents will be exterminated —his crown will be his brother's.”

“ From the scene of carnage you depict Madame,” said Crichton, “ my mind flies back to days gone by—to the fair month of June, 1559. Before the palace of the Tournelles, a splendid tournament is set forth

to celebrate the nuptials of Elizabeth of France with Philip of Spain. A chivalrous monarch maintains the passage of arms against all comers. That monarch is your husband. That monarch is Henri II."

" No more,—no more."

" That monarch demands a favour from his Queen. Her scarf is sent him. He places it upon his corslet. He calls to the Earl of Montgomery to place his lance in rest. The Earl obeys him. The combatants rush upon each other. The lance of Montgomery is broken—"

" Hold! we command you, messire."

" But a splinter hath pierced the brain of the ill-fated king," continued Crichton, heedless of Catherine's frowns. " He falls mortally wounded. You witnessed this fearful catastrophe, Madame. You saw your husband hurled bleeding to the earth—and to a like fate you would now condemn your son—*his son!*"

“ Have you yet done ?”

“ Think you I am an assassin, Madame, that you propose to me a deed from which even the ruthless bravo of your native Italy would shrink aghast.”

“ If we propose a deed dark and terrible, we offer a proportionate reward,” returned Catherine. “ Stay !” continued she, drawing from her escarcelle a small roll of parchment, to which a broad seal was appended, “ here is your appointment.”

“ It bears date to-morrow.”

“ It will be ratified to-night,” rejoined the Queen, placing the document upon a tapestry-covered table which stood beside them. “ Behold the royal signet,—behold your title as Marshal of France ! Your answer ?”

“ Is this”—replied Crichton, suddenly drawing his poignard, and striking it through the parchment, with such force that all trace of his name was effectually obliterated.

“ Enough !” exclaimed Catherine, tearing

the mutilated document from the board.
“ You shall learn anon whose wrath you have provoked.”

“ Threat for threat, Madame,” returned the undaunted Scot. “ You may find in me a formidable enemy.”

“ Ha ! ” ejaculated the Queen, pausing—
“ you will not betray our confidence ? Your knightly word is passed.”

“ It is,” replied Crichton ; “ but your Majesty forgets that Ruggieri is in my power.”

Catherine smiled.

“ Ruggieri will betray nothing,” said she.

“ He has sworn to reveal *all* on condition that his life be spared,” returned Crichton.

Catherine’s brow darkened for an instant ; but the same sinister smile still played around her lips.

“ If our Astrologer be your sole instrument of offence, messire,” said she, “ we have little to apprehend.”

“ Your Majesty is confident,” rejoined Crichton, “ what, if I tell you that the

packet containing the proofs of the Princess Esclairmonde's birth is found?—what if I add that your own letters to the Duc D'Anjou—your dispatches to the Prince Vincenzo di Gonzaga are now on their way to the King?"

"What if we answer—it is false?—false as your assertion, that Ruggieri will betray us. That packet will never reach the King. That packet is in our possession. The Huguenot preacher, who was to have conveyed it to Henri is our prisoner."

"The powers of darkness have not deserted your majesty, I perceive," said Crichton, with a look of astonishment.

"Nor those of earth," retorted Catherine, clapping her hands. "Let Ruggieri be brought before us," added she, as the attendants appeared.

The men betrayed evident symptoms of alarm—and one of them stammered out something like an excuse.

"How is this?" demanded Crichton.

“ Have ye dared to disobey his Majesty’s commands?—have ye suffered your prisoner to escape?”

At this moment two of the hooded officials entered the pavilion.

“ Where is the Astrologer? — answer on your lives?” said Crichton.

“ We are come to seek him here, monseigneur,” said the foremost of the twain.

“ Here!” echoed Crichton furiously.

“ Yes, monseigneur,” returned the man; “ we had no sooner placed him in the guard-room than he disappeared; we know not how or where—and we thought he was as likely to be here, as in any other place.”

“ I recognise your hand in this, Madame,” said the Scot, turning to Catherine.

The Queen replied with a bitter smile.

“ The powers of darkness have not yet deserted us, you perceive, messire.”

“ The other prisoner, however, is safe enough,” said the foremost official as he drew back.

“ What prisoner ? ” demanded Crichton eagerly.

“ The heretic Preacher,” returned the man, “ he is at hand if you desire to interrogate him.” And without waiting for the Scot’s reply he motioned to his comrade, who, in his turn, motioned to some one without, and the curtain of the tent being drawn aside, with his arms bound with cords, and his whole appearance betokening great personal suffering from ill-usage, the venerable Florent Chrétien was dragged into the pavilion.

“ His companion, the Englishman, escaped us,” interposed the official, who acted as spokesman, “ owing to a fiend in the form of a dog, with fangs like a wolf, who fought by his side and covered his flight. But he cannot have passed the gates of the Louvre—and we may yet secure him.”

Crichton was about to rush to the assistance of the captive Preacher, to free him

from his bondage. But a look from the old man restrained him.

“ It is in vain, my son,” said Chrétien “ do not draw down your blood likewise upon my head.”

“ The packet ?” demanded Crichton, with frantic eagerness; “ say it hath not fallen into the hands of this remorseless Queen—say you have given it to the Englishman Blount—say that he hasteneth to the king—say there is yet hope.”

“ Alas! my son, why should I deceive you? My mission hath failed. Our enemies triumph. They have pursued me sore. Like a bird I have fallen into their snare. The precious casket hath been stolen from me. There is no hope save from on high.”

“ Heaven will work no miracle in thy behalf, rank heretic that thou art,” said Catherine; “ the populace, robbed of the spectacle they anticipated in Ruggieri’s execution by fire, will need a victim. They shall have one. The stake shall not have

been planted, nor the fagots piled within the Prés-aux-clerces in vain. Abjure thine heresies old man. Make thy peace above. Thy sentence is pronounced."

"I desire no better end," replied Chrétien, "my death shall be a testimony to the faithful."

"Your fanatic zeal blinds you, good father," said Crichton—"forsake your errors while there is yet time."

"Forsake them!" echoed the Preacher, with fervour, "never! Flames may consume my breathing body. Torture may rend my limbs asunder. But my lips shall never gainsay my heart. For a death like this, my whole life hath been a preparation. I am not taken by surprise. My house is set in order. I shall glory in my martyrdom. I shall rejoice to be numbered with the righteous, who have perished in the service of their God. It is thou, my son, who art in error. It is thou who art blinded and perverse. It is thou who art in danger of unquenchable flame. Let my words dwell with

thee—let my spirit be upon thee. So shall I not die in vain ; so shall thy own end be happy—be joyful as mine. Thou hast called me father—as a father I bestow my blessing upon thee.”

“ As a father — oh God ! ” exclaimed Crichton, his eyes filling with emotion, and his voice faltering.

“ Kneel down, my son, an old man’s benediction, whatever may be his creed, cannot injure you.”*

Crichton instantly threw himself at the Preacher’s feet.

“ Heaven’s grace descend upon your head, my son,” said Chrétien, bending over him ; “ and may the dawning of a new light from henceforth break upon your soul ! ”

“ My soul will never swerve from its fixed bias,” replied Crichton, as he arose from the benediction. “ I admire your con-

* These, or nearly these words were addressed by the Pope Benedict XIV. to Horace Walpole.

stancy ; but my faith is changeless as your own. I shall be no apostate."

" *Video meliora, proboque, deteriora sequor,*" sighed the old man—" ah ! my son ! you are stubborn in unbelief. But my prayers will not be unheard, and your name, together with that of one dear to you as to myself, shall mingle with my latest breath. I shall expire in the hope of your spiritual regeneration. For thee, perfidious, and bloody-minded woman," continued he, turning to Catherine, and regarding her with a terrible look, " a day of dreadful retribution is at hand. Thy portion shall be that of the idolatrous Queen of Judah. Evil shall be brought upon thee, and shame. Thy posterity shall be utterly taken away. With blood hast thou polluted this city ; and with thy own blood shall it be cleansed. ' Vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord, ' and I will repay.' "

" Peace, blasphemer," interrupted the Queen, " and learn to thy confusion, that if

the arm of heaven hath been manifested at all, it hath this day been declared in favour of the religion thou deridest. The leader upon whom the reliance of your miserable sect is placed—our chief enemy hath been delivered into our hands. Ha! thou tremblest,—have we found a way to shake thy inflexible spirit?"

"It cannot be!" exclaimed Chrétien, with a despairing look.

"It *is*," returned Catherine triumphantly, "we hold thy chieftain within our toils."

"Ah fatal rashness!" cried Chrétien bitterly—"but I will not murmur against the decrees of Providence. I pray your Majesty to send me forth, I am very faint."

"Take him hence," said Catherine, "and let it be proclaimed by sound of trumpet in each quarter of our faithful and Catholic city, that a Huguenot minister will be put to death by fire at midnight within the Prés-aux-clercs. Let the ecclesiastical authorities receive instant intimation to attend. Here is

your warrant," added she, delivering a written paper to the official.

" Your majesty hath delivered me the wrong order," said the official, glancing at the superscription of the scroll, " this is a warrant for the execution of Cosmo Ruggieri, Abbé of Saint Mahé, convicted of the crimes of lèze-majesté and sorcery."

" It will suffice," returned the Queen imperiously; " remove your prisoner."

Chrétien dropped upon his knees.

" How long, O Lord, holy and true," cried he, gazing earnestly towards heaven, " dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell upon the earth?"

And with these words his reverend head declined upon his breast; while supported by the two officials, he was borne out of the pavilion.

" Your majesty is, indeed, an inexorable enemy," said Crichton, gazing after the unfortunate Preacher, with looks of the deepest commiseration.

“ And as unalterable a friend,” returned the Queen, “ it is for you now to determine, Chevalier Crichton, in which light we must henceforth be considered. A word ere we part. In Henri you have a rival. He loves the Princess Esclairmonde.”

“ I know it, Madame—”

“ To night she is his, or your’s.”

“ *His* she shall never be.”

“ Then you accept our terms?”

At this moment the loud blast of a bugle was heard sounding from the further end of the tilt-yard.

“ A knightly challenge!” exclaimed Crichton, listening for a repetition of the notes.

“ A *kingly* challenge,” returned Catherine, “ that trumpet blast is the defiance of Henri of Navarre.”

“ Henri of Navarre!” echoed Crichton, in astonishment, “ he then is the Huguenot leader whom fate hath delivered into your hands.”

“ He is,” replied Catherine, “ we are indebted to chance for this important discovery. One of our demoiselles, La Rebours, as she rode to the Louvre, was struck with the resemblance of a soldier in the train of the Baron de Rosni, to Henri of Bourbon. The circumstance was casually alluded to in our hearing. Our suspicions were at once aroused. Our spies were instantly put upon the scent, and we found that the soldier was the Monarch in masquerade. This secret must rest between ourselves, messire.”

“ Fear nothing, Madame,” answered the Scot, “ my lips are sealed.”

“ We learnt also, that this fool-hardy King was about to attend the jousts held at the Louvre, for the express purpose of breaking a lance with you.”

“ With me, Madame?”

“ Your renown as an expert tilter has, we conclude, reached his ears, and he is resolved to put it to the proof. But hark ! his trumpet

sounds for the second time. This conference must be brought to a close. Your answer to our proposal?"

" Shall be delivered after the jousts."

" Our confidence in the meantime—?"

" Shall be held sacred. I swear it."

" Enough —after the jousts we shall expect you within the royal gallery. Place your hand, as if by accident, upon your poignard when you approach us. From the gesture we shall infer that you assent. Dieu vous garde! messire."

Saying which Catherine summoned her attendants and quitted the pavilion.

" What ho! my lance—my steed," shouted Crichton, snatching his helmet from the armourer, who had promptly answered his call,—" ha! Saint-Andrew, my gorget, my gauntlets! By heaven!" murmured he, " to cross a lance with the bravest Prince in Christendom, were reward enough for a thousand risks. Our Lady aid me in this essay!"

In another instant his equipments were

completed, and vaulting upon his steed, the Scot dashed through the entrance of the lists.

No sooner was the coast clear, than from beneath the tapestry-covered table, which we have described as standing in the middle of the tent, emerged first a long conical cap—then a fantastic visage in which drollery was strangely mixed up with apprehension—and lastly the odd-shaped, parti-coloured person of Chicot—his teeth chattering, and his limbs shaking.

“Sang de cabres!” cried he, after casting an anxious glance around. “I have stolen here to some purpose. Pretty revelations I have heard. A conspiracy on the eve of breaking forth!—our dear Henriot about to be transfixed with a lance as his father was transfixed before him. Had it been the cloister to which he was condemned I should not have cared—he had always a taste for the frock—but assassination!—Cernes de diable! I am horror-stricken. Old Buridan was in the right to propound his sophism- ‘*Reginam*

interficere nolite timere bonum esse.' It would be a praiseworthy act to put Madame Catherine out of the way. But Buridan's theorems are out of fashion even in the Sorbonne. What is to be done? Luckily *I* have made no vow not to betray her Majesty's confidence—and if I had, on an occasion like the present, I should not scruple to break it. What is to be done? I ask myself that question for the second time. I am sorely perplexed. Who will believe my tale? I shall be laughed at—cuffed—perhaps—be put out of the way myself—the common fate of meddlers. I have it. I will abide the issue of the jousts, and then confer with this Scot—for I can guess what answer he means to give our Jezabel. How runs the pasquil?

Twixt Catherine and Jezabel
The difference is small—
The one the plague of Israel,
The other plague of Gaul.

But if the fate of Jezabel
Our Catherine should befall,
The very dogs would (mark me well !)
Refuse to eat at all.*"

And muttering these scurrilous strains as he went, the Jester crept cautiously out of the pavilion.

* From a bitter pasquinade in the Journal of Henri III., entitled "*Comparaison de Catherine et de Jezabel.*"

CHAPTER VI.

THE BÉARNAIS.

QUE direz-vous, fâcheux maris, de cette souffrance ?
N'aurez-vous point de peur, que vos femmes vous laissent
pour venir à moi ? ou n'estimerez vous point plutôt que
ce fût quelque lâcheté.

DIVORCE SATIRIQUE.

As Crichton rode into the tilt-yard, he found Henri, encircled by his favourites, impatiently awaiting his return, and speculating upon the haughty defiance with which the walls of the Louvre yet resounded.

“ Away, Montjoie—away, messieurs,” cried the monarch, addressing the king-of-arms, and the heralds, “ do your devoir quickly, and

bring us word what hardy champion dares to intrude within our lists. Par la mort-dieu ! it would seem we hold a free passage of arms, and not private jousts. But this adventurer, whoever he may be, shall rue his temerity. Away ! and let us know his title and condition. Ha ! you are come,” added he, as the Scot drew in the rein by his side—“ we shall question you anon, messire, as to the nature of your interminable conference with our mother. We suspect from your looks, that you have been hatching some treason against us. Is it so ?”

“ Sire !” exclaimed Crichton, reddening.

“ By our faith ! your interview *hath* made you serious since you thus resent our jest,” said the king, smiling ; “ and no wonder—for, certes, a tête-à-tête of any duration with her majesty, Catherine de Medicis, is no laughing matter, even to ourself. However, upon the present occasion we ought to thank, rather than chide you, for detaining her so long, as her absence has enabled us to lay

closer siege to her lovely Demoiselle, than we should have cared to do in her presence. A propos of the fair Esclairmonde, Chevalier Crichton, so soon as we have disposed of this unknown challenger, it is our intention to splinter a lance with you in her honour. We have no fears of your disloyalty you see, or we should not thus heedlessly place our life at your disposal."

" Be warned, Sire !" said a deep voice, " and run no course to-day."

Henri started.

" Who speaks ?" ejaculated he, turning with some misgiving, in the supposed direction of the sound. His looks of enquiry fell upon the frank countenance of the Vicomte de Joyeuse, which was charged with as much astonishment as his own.

" Remember thy father's fate !" exclaimed the same deep voice, now appearing to sound from a different quarter,—" beware !"

" Sang-dieu !" vociferated the King, fu-

riously. “ Who dares thus address us ? Let him stand forth.”

But no answer was returned : nor was any movement made in obedience to Henri’s mandate.

The courtiers eyed each other with glances of suspicion. No one, however, could tax his neighbour with having uttered the ominous words.

“ Jesus ! ” exclaimed Henri, in a tone of some uneasiness, at the same time secretly crossing himself, “ that voice recalls our idle terrors of last night. But there can be no sarbacane upon the present occasion.”

“ Vive-dieu ! no, Sire,” cried Joyeuse, springing to the King’s side. “ But there may be other artifice.”

“ It may be well not to neglect the caution, my gracious liege,” said Saint-Luc, who was almost as superstitious as his sovereign, “ Charles le Bien-Aimé had his warning.”

“ And our ill-fated father, likewise—” mused the King.

“ Your Majesty will not suffer yourself to be deterred from entering the jousts by this imposture,” said Joyeuse, “ were I in your place, Sire, I would show my contempt of this hidden traitor’s counsel, by seizing a lance and proceeding at once to the barriers.”

“ Joyeuse is in the right,” said the Duc de Nevers, with a singular smile, “ it were an impeachment of the Chevalier Crichton’s loyalty to refuse him, upon such light grounds, the honour of a career with your Majesty.”

It is an honour which I have not sought, monsieur le Duc,” returned Crichton, sternly ; “ and I pray you to remember that the stroke by which Henri II. fell was *accidental*.”

“ Speak not of it, mon cher,” said the King, shuddering.

“ Servans d’amours regardez doucement,
Aux eschaffaux anges de paradis—”

sang Joyeuse, anxious to re-assure the pusillanimous monarch. “ Think of the bright

eyes that will watch your prowess, Sire ;
think of the belle Esclairmonde."

Henri glanced towards the grand gallery ;
he there beheld the fair Princess of Condé,
'the cynosure of neighbouring eyes,' and his
fears instantly vanished.

"Thou hast restored us, my brother,"
said he to the Vicomte, "we will think
of the mistress of our heart. Were it to be
our last career we would no longer hesitate."

"It *will* be your last," said the deep voice,
sounding yet more hollowly.

"Ha!" ejaculated Henri, relapsing into
all his former terrors,—"that voice again !
This passeth a jest—if a jest be intended ; and
though we pardoned our buffoon Chicot's
effrontery last night, think not we will tolerate
similar freedom to day. Look to it,
messeigneurs, and let our hidden monitor
who lacketh the courage to discover himself,
in his turn, beware."

"Methinks your hidden counsellor displays
more courage and forbearance in concealing

himself," said Crichton, " than he would do were he to obey your mandate. He can have nothing to apprehend from your Majesty."

At this moment, and while the utmost confusion prevailed amid the royal group, to Henri's infinite relief, Montjoie and his attendant heralds returned.

" Heaven be praised!" exclaimed the king, " if we are to be kept in the dark respecting this mysterious warning, our curiosity will, at all events, be gratified on another point of equal interest to us. Thou art welcome, Montjoie. Thy news?—the name and condition of this hardy adventurer? Yet hold! Ere thou speakest we will wager this chain of pearls against the knot of ribbands that flutters on the Chevalier Crichton's helm, that this champion is the Balafré."

" I accept your wager, Sire," said Crichton.
" Favour against favour."

" Decide, Montjoie," said Henri.

" Your Majesty is the loser," returned the king-of-arms, " it is *not* the Duc de Guise."

“ Diantre !” exclaimed Henri, reluctantly yielding the gage to Crichton, “ you are ever fortunate. It were vain to contend with one upon whom the capricious goddess eversmiles.”

“ Certes, your Majesty hath lost a talisman which more than tempered steel would have been proof against my lance,” rejoined the Scot. Saying which he joyfully unhelmed himself, and attached the string of pearls to his casque.

Executed with consummate grace, this slight action was not unobserved by the fair Princess, by whom the ornament had been worn. Her situation, as the reader knows, enabled her to command the whole scene, and she witnessed with surprise the (to her) inexplicable conduct of the king towards his rival. Her surprise was, however, speedily changed into admiration and delight as she beheld her lover’s employment ; and as she gazed upon his proud head, now divested of all covering, save that afforded by his fair and flowing tresses ; as she looked upon that stately and snow-white throat springing from out his

“habiliments of war,” like the moulded neck of Antinous; as she listened to the unrestrained praises of the dames, by whom she was surrounded; and the louder plaudits of the admiring multitude; and as she finally encountered his enamoured gaze, and felt that he to whom all this homage was paid, rendered homage alone to her,—shall we injure her in the esteem of the fair reader, if we say that something of self-elation, mingled with her tenderer emotions? Waving her hand as Crichton replaced his bourginot upon his brow, her salutation was instantly acknowledged by the Scot with a look and gesture of the deepest devotion.

Henri, meantime, turning to Montjoie, continued his interrogations respecting the stranger knight.

“As by the laws of chivalry he is permitted to do, my liege,” returned Montjoie in answer to the King’s enquiry, “this champion claims to be exempted from the disclosure of his name.”

“ And thou hast recognised his right to do so, we will be sworn ?” said Henri in a petulant tone.

“ In the due discharge of mine office, as your Majesty’s representative in the court of arms I could not do otherwise,” returned Montjoie.

“ You have done well, Sir,” said the King, frowning.

“ I have fulfilled my duty, Sire,” returned Montjoie bluntly : “ your grandsire, François I., of glorious memory, would not have thus rebuked me.”

“ Nor will his grandson,” said Henri kindly ; “ your pardon, my old and loyal servant.”

“ My gracious liege—”

“ No more !—What title hath this knight inscribed upon your rolls ?”

“ A strange one, Sire—the Béarnais.”

“ The Béarnais !” exclaimed Henri, in surprise, “ this is some mockery. There is but one champion in Europe who hath a right to

that title, and he is not so much in want of warlike pastime, or so fool-hardy as to venture hither in quest of knightly adventures."

"The cavalier is, perchance, one of the king of Navarre's valiant captains, who hath, for the nonce, usurped his sovereign's title," returned Montjoie—"it may be Chatillon or D'Aubigné."

"Is he unattended?" demanded Henri.

"No, my liege," answered Montjoie, "his companion is the King of Navarre's envoy, Maximilian de Bethunes, Baron de Rosni."

"Ah! the Polydor of our cousin Alcandre," said the King, smiling.

"And the husband of the fair Dioclée," observed Joyeuse, significantly.

"Madame de Rosni is still alive, I believe, though her husband threatened her with the dagger and the bowl, when he discovered her inconstancy with Henri of Navarre—eh! Marquis?" said Saint-Luc, addressing Villequier.

This was a home thrust. The Governor of

Paris, a few years back, had slain his first wife, Françoise de la Marck, for a like fault.* He endeavoured, however, to parry the stroke.

“The Baron de Rosni is a base and contented wittol,” said he, with a sneer, “and merits his fate. Fortunate are they who possess spouses sufficiently ill-favoured to ensure their safety.”

The laugh was now on the Governor’s side, for the Baroness (as we have before remarked) was the plainest woman of her time.

Saint-Luc was about to make an angry retort to Villequier’s raillery; but his petulance was checked by the King.

“No more of this, messeigneurs,” said Henri; “here comes the Baron de Rosni and his unknown companion. We pray you observe them closely.”

And as he spoke, two knights, completely armed, and each followed by an esquire bear-

* *Cruentus sanguine uxoris, Pictavii ob improveratam sibi propudosam vitam interfectæ. Thuanus.*

ing his shield and lance, entered the champ-clos. The foremost of the twain, whose stature, originally large, was materially increased in bulk by the ponderous plates of steel in which his limbs were cased, was mounted on a fiery, jet-black barb — so fiery, indeed, as to require the utmost efforts of his rider's powerful arm to restrain his impatience. The visor of the knight was closed and through its narrow bars not even the flashing of an eye could be discerned. One uniform ruddy tint pervaded his equipments. From sallade to solleret, his harness was crimson-coloured. His panache of ostrich-plumes, “*longs et haulx* ;” the sweeping caparisons of his charger; the feather'd tufts that nodded on the chamfrin and croup of the lordly animal; the shield and battle-axe that hung at his saddle-bow were all of the same sanguine hue.

Behind this champion, who it is needless to say, was Henri of Navarre, rode an esquire in livery of similar complexion, bearing in his

right hand a lance, on the point of which, fluttered a small silken pennon, and on his left arm a buckler, on which was painted the simple flower, so exquisitely described by a great poet of our time, as

A silver shield with boss of gold
That spreads itself, some Faëry bold
In fight to cover : *—

surmounted by a diadem, with the following couplet traced in golden characters beneath it :—

J'aurai toujours au cœur écrite
Sur toutes fleurs la Marguerite.

It was evident from the device that this posy was intended as an allusion to Marguerite of Navarre.

The Baron de Rosni (better known by his subsequent illustrious title of the Duc de Sully) appeared in the same martial apparel-

* Wordsworth. Lines to the Daisy.

ing in which he was first introduced to the reader. His long two-handed sword—a formidable weapon, described by a skilful professor of the art of defence, Giacomo di Grassi, as being “four handfuls in the handle, or more, having also the great cross”—was still girt to his side. The housings of his steed, a powerful roan, were crimson and black in colour; while plumes of the same mixed hues crested his morion, the visor of which was raised.

“ Yon knight is of larger make than Alcandre, my liege,” said Joyeuse, “ it cannot be him.”

“ By Saint Andrew!” exclaimed Crichton, who had witnessed the entrance of the two chieftains with rapturous enthusiasm, “ the glowing trappings of yon preux chevalier remind me of the lay of the brave Louis de Beauveau, (as charming troubadour as he was expert tilter,) wherein he hath depicted his own appearance at the jousts. Thus runs his ditty, if I remember rightly :—

Les plus rouges y sont pris.

I.

SLOWLY unto the listed field I rode,
Rouge was my charger's wide caparison ;
And the same hue that on his housing glowed,
Empurpled shield, and spear, and morion.

II.

Rouge was my couvrechief, that swept the sward,
Rouge the tall plume, that nodded on my crest ;
And the rich scarf—my loyalty's reward—
Blushed, like a timorous virgin, on my breast.

III.

My broad ensanguined shield bore this device,
In golden letters writ, that all might see
How for bold deeds will lightest words suffice,
And thus it ran—“ *Les plus rouges y sont pris.*”

“Have a care ! mon cher,” said Joyeuse, smiling at his friend’s ardour. “See you not against whose shield the lance of yon doughty knight is directed?”

“I do,” replied Crichton, striking his spurs into his steed, and compelling him to execute a rapid succession of curvets; “and I render thanks to Saint George, the patron of chivalry, that the appeal hath been made to me.”

“By the memory of my valiant uncle François de Vivonne,” exclaimed the Abbé de Brantôme, who, though we have not hitherto particularized him, formed one of the group of courtiers in attendance upon the King; “you are the flower of knighthood, Chevalier Crichton, and appear to revive in your own person one of those hardy champions of whom François I., standing upon the very spot where we are now assembled, said, in admiration of their achievements,

‘ Chateigneraye, Vielleville et Bourdillon,
Sont les trois hardis compagnons !’”

“ The saying would apply with equal force to the champions of our own time, my dear Abbé,” returned Crichton, smiling. “ The courage of the three renowned warriors you have named survives in their successors ; the kingly courtesy of François is renewed in his descendant ; and our own monarch might, with as much truth as his ancestor, exclaim,

Joyeuse, Saint-Luc et D’Épernon
Sont trois chevaliers beaux et bons.”

The three nobles smilingly acknowledged the compliment ; nor did Henri appear less gratified than his favourites.

“ What is all this ?” cried Chicot, who had now found his way to the side of his royal master, “ what miserable distich is that I hear ? Talk of ancestors and descendants—pouah !—I, who am the descendant of the great Triboulet, who was fool to a greater

fool, and upon whom my ancestor's cap and bells, as well as his office, hath fallen—I Chicot, buffoon in ordinary to—

Henri, par la grace de sa Mère,
Inerte Roi de France, et de Pologne imaginaire.

swear and declare upon my bauble, that

Joyeuse, Saint-Luc et D'Épernon
Sont fous au merveilleux Crichton !

And there's a better rhyme, as well as sounder reason for you."

Henri of Navarre, meanwhile, followed by his esquire, (having left the Baron de Rosni at the entrance of the tilt-yard), slowly traversed the arena, attracting universal attention, especially among the gentler sex, by his athletic and finely-formed figure, by the singularity of his equipments, and more than all, by his *verd-gallant* and amorous demeanour, which even danger could not subdue, nor bars of iron entirely conceal. The carelessness with which he bestrode his mettle-

some and curveting charger ; the continual movements of his helm from side to side, as his ardent glances wandered over the crowd of beauties ; the majestic ease of his carriage, and a thousand indescribable graces, none of which were lost upon the spectators, worked wonders in his favour. Something indeed there was in the gallant Bourbon's manly form, that, under any disguise he might assume, never failed to awaken immediate interest in the female bosom. On the present occasion its effect was little less than magical. And, as he paused for a moment beneath the grand gallery, a perfect sensation was excited among its fair and frolic occupants.

“ Who is he ?” ran from lip to lip.

“ It is the Duc D'Anjou,” said Madaine de Narmoutiers.

“ It is Bussy D'Amboise,” said Isabel de Montsoreau.

“ It is the Duc de Guise,” said la Maréchale de Retz.

“ Mon dieu ! Mesdames, yon knight’s armour would encase all three,” said Torigni, screaming with laughter, “ You ought to know your old lovers better.”

“ Unless like the Demoiselle Torigni, we should have had so many as to have forgotten all save the last,” returned the Maréchale maliciously.

“ Merci, Madame,” said the Florentine, “ you are quite welcome to attack my memory so long as you compliment my attractions.”

“ What if it be the gendarme of the rue Pelican ?” sighed La Rebours.

“ Your head has been running all the morning upon that soldier, Demoiselle,” said La Fosseuse pettishly, “ you thought him like Henri of Navarre, and now you think every body like *him*.”

“ Ah ! if it should be the Bourbon, after all !” said La Rebours, suddenly recovering her animation.

“ Whoever he may be,” said Torigni, “ he

has decidedly the finest figure of any knight in the tilt-yard—the Chevalier Crichton not excepted."

"Name not the traitor in my hearing," said Marguerite de Valois, whose attention this chance allusion to her lover's name had aroused.

"Our unknown Cavalier appears in search of some dame, from whom he may solicit a favour," said the Maréchale de Retz.

"And he is so like the Duc de Guise that *you* cannot possibly refuse him," said Torigni.

"His glances are directed towards La Rebours," said La Fosseuse—"see ne moves."

"To me!" ejaculated La Rebours, crimsoning to the temples—"no," added she, with a look of deep disappointment—"it is to her Majesty."

"And see you not the device on his shield," said Torigni, "and the motto

*J'aurai toujours au cœur écrite
Sur toutes fleurs la Marguerite.*

He is, evidently an aspirant to the smiles of our gracious mistress. Your Majesty," continued the artful Florentine, addressing the Queen in a low tone, " will have now an opportunity of fully revenging yourself upon your inconstant lover."

" You forget whom you address, minion," said Marguerite, vainly endeavouring to hide her emotion under a mask of impatience ; " once more I forbid you to allude to him."

" As you please, Madame," returned Torigni pettishly.

At this moment a Page pressed forward, and bending the knee before the Queen of Navarre, tendered the homage of the unknown knight—" the companion-in-arms of the Baron de Rosni," said he, " who solicits some slight token from your Majesty, that he may splinter a lance in your behalf with the Chevalier Crichton."

" With CRICHTON ! " exclaimed Marguerite, rising.

" I was in the right you see, Madame,"

cried Torigni; but perceiving the fearful change that had taken place in the countenance of the Queen, she checked her vivacity; “after all she *will* avenge herself upon her lover,” thought the Demoiselle, “that look reminds me of the night when Guillaume Du Prat, enticed by her caresses to the deed, for-ever silenced the envenomed tongue of her enemy Du Guast.”

“ This Knight is the companion of the Baron de Rosni, thou say’st?” demanded Marguerite with an abstracted air.

“ His brother-in-arms, Madame,” returned the youth.

“ He shall receive a gage from our own hand,” said the Queen, after a brief pause.

“ He will value it the more highly,” rejoined the youth. “ Honoured by so fair a Queen, his success in the career is certain.”

“ On my faith, beau sire, thou hast learnt thine office betimes,” said Torigni, smiling.

“ Let thy lord attend us within the chamber, beneath this gallery,” said Marguerite;

“ Demoiselles Torigni, and La Rebours, you will accompany us.”

The Page arose and departed.

“ May I crave a word with your Majesty ? ” said Esclairmonde, approaching the Queen.

“ Your pardon, Demoiselle,” replied Marguerite haughtily, “ we would pass.”

Saying which she quitted the gallery, followed by her attendants.

Having completed his survey of the fair occupants of the balcony, and despatched the message we have just heard delivered, Henri of Navarre spurred his steed in the direction of the pavilion, before which, attached to a halbert struck deeply into the earth, was displayed Crichton’s shield. Snatching a lance from his esquire, the monarch struck it against the targe with so much good will, that the halbert and its clanging burthen were at once borne to the ground; while startled by the noise of the falling arms, his charger began to rear and plunge violently.

“ Harnibieu !” muttered Henri, sharply applying his armed heel to the flanks of the unruly animal, and by a powerful effort reducing him to subjection ; “ this froward steed is evidently unused to the exercises of the tilt-yard. He starts at the clatter of steel as an unmanaged colt winceth at the lash of the chambrière. He may know his paces ; but, I doubt if I shall be able to bring him to the rest, after the career. My sage counsellor Rosni had, I suspect, his own motives in persuading me to abandon my brave old Norman charger, whom the roar of a culverin, or the clash of a thousand pikes would not affright, and whom I can restrain with a silken thread, for this high-spirited and fantastic barb, because, forsooth, he hath finer limbs, and a sleeker coat. The knave would gladly see me discomfited, that his own superior wisdom may, in future, be acknowledged. It shall go hard, however, if I do not, despite his ingenious stratagem, outwit him. At all events I will not give him the satis-

faction of perceiving the annoyance he hath occasioned me. I have overcome greater obstacles than this rebellious animal presents—ay, and turned them to account too. An enterprise without danger is of little worth. *Invia virtuti nulla est via* :—hath ever been my device. And now for my lady's token! Sa ha! sirrah—take heed!—You carry Cæsar and his fortunes.” Again applying the spur, and checking the impetuous movements of his steed with an arm of iron, Henri, as deliberately as he came, returned to the grand gallery.

“ Her Majesty will bestow the token upon you with her own hand, monseigneur,” said the Page, advancing to meet him.

“ A la bonne heure!” exclaimed the King. “ This is exactly what I wished.” Saying which he dismounted, and flinging the rein to his esquire, entered the scaffold with a light and joyous footstep.

“ This way, Sir Knight,” said one of the huissiers stationed at the portal. “ The

Queen of Navarre will give you audience within this chamber." A tapestried curtain, suspended before an open valve, was then drawn aside, and the King found himself in the presence of his consort.

Henri of Bourbon was not wont to have misgivings where a lady was concerned. But the situation in which he had placed himself with his Queen was rather embarrassing. It was a relief to him, therefore, to find that she was not alone. Having no such apprehensions, and not being aware who it was that stood before her, Marguerite immediately on the King's appearance, dismissed her attendants. La Rebours lingered for an instant behind her companion ; and as she passed the monarch, her embroidered handkerchief, (it might have been by accident) fell to the ground. Henri stooped to raise it ; and as he restored the perfumed mouchoir to its fair owner, his hand divested of his gauntlet, contrived to encounter the taper fingers of the Demoiselle. Assuredly it was

not by accident that the pressure which he hazarded was so perceptibly returned.

“ *Ventre-saint-gris!* ” muttered the King, “ this is the lovely dame whom I beheld in the rue Pelican.”

“ I will stake my life that it is Henri of Navarre,” thought La Rebours, glancing from beneath her downcast eyelids at the Bourbon’s stately figure; “ and if so,” ran her meditations, as she quitted the room, “ there can be no danger in trusting him with his Queen. I need apprehend no rivalry in that quarter. Kings are seldom uxorious—and connubial devotion is certainly not Henri’s foible.”

If the Monarch felt disconcerted at the idea of a tête-à-tête with his spouse, his embarrassment was not diminished when he found that this little piece of gallantry had not escaped her notice. His fears, however, were needless. Marguerite entertained no jealousy of *him*; though it suited her purpose to affect some slight pique.

“ The kerchief of our Demoiselle would

seem to have a higher value in your eyes, messire," said she, "than any gage we could bestow, were it even a tress of our own hair to bind upon your helm!"

" You are mistaken, Madame," returned Henri in a feigned voice, but in the impassioned tone which he had ever at command, " the simple pearl is lovely in mine eyes; but the ' pearl of pearls ' is that which winneth my homage. As Jean de la Taille, from whom I have borrowed the scroll upon my shield, sings

Ce ne fut pas la paquerette
L'œillet, la rose ni le lys :
Ce fut la belle Marguerite,
Qu'au cœur j'aurai toujours écrite.

Marguerite, your name is inscribed upon my heart as upon my buckler. Recal not your boon I implore of you. Yield me that treasured gage, and you ensure me victory."

" If it *will* ensure you victory it is yours," said Marguerite eagerly..

" What, you refuse to 'love, you readily

accord to hate, I perceive," returned Henri.
" You have some quarrel to avenge upon the
Chevalier Crichton."

" The deepest a woman hath to avenge,"
replied Marguerite. " I will not disguise
from you, messire, that I have to requite a
lover's inconstancy."

" So," thought Henri, " *I* am destined to
hear my own dishonour proclaimed by lips
to which I cannot with propriety, give
the lie. I also have a quarrel to arrange
with this Scottish Knight," added he aloud ;
" you could not have found a fitter champion
to redress your wrongs. He hath injured me
as deeply as yourself."

" Impossible."

" Corbleu ! Madame," returned Henri,
" most men would consider my injuries
the heavier. But I will not contest
the point. You are, undoubtedly, the best
judge as to which of us is the greatest
sufferer."

“ I see to what you allude, messire,” said Marguerite. “ *I* have to complain of the perfidy of a lover—*you* of the infidelity of a wife.”

“ Precisely so,” replied Henri.

“ Wash out the stain upon your name in the traitor’s blood,” exclaimed the Queen; “ as to your faithless dame, if the death of her paramour will not content your vengeance, I swear if she belong to the Court of France, or to that of my royal husband, Henri of Navarre, her crime shall not pass unpunished.”

“ The guilt of the adulteress shall not pass unpunished,” rejoined Henri, gravely. “ But it is well for my faithless dame that my plan of retribution differs from that proposed by your Majesty.

“ You love her then despite her fault.” said Marguerite.

“ No,” replied Henri mournfully—“ but I *have* loved her—and for that remembered tenderness I will spare her.”

“ Your dame is fortunate in the possession of a lord so patient,” returned Marguerite scornfully.

“ She is more fortunate than she deserves to be, I must own, Madame,” answered Henri.

“ You may repent this weakness when it is too late,” rejoined Marguerite. “ I comprehend not how a wrong like this can be forgiven.”

“ Would not these words pass sentence upon yourself, Madame, were they uttered in the presence of the King your husband ?”

“ Speak not of Henri,” said the Queen. “ He hath long divorced himself from my love. If I have been faithless consort, he hath been faithless lord. He cannot complain. I *could* have loved him—but—— ”

“ But what—Marguerite ?”

“ No matter ! It is not of *him* I would speak—but of yourself.”

“ Two persons closely connected,” thought the King.

“ Hear me ! ” cried Marguerite, clasping Henri’s fingers with a hand that burnt with fever ; “ your dame has wronged you—you love her not.”

“ I have already confessed as much, Madame. Open not my bleeding wounds anew.”

“ I do so but to heal them. Now mark me, messire. Let the result of this career be fatal to—to the Chevalier Crichton, and what I have of love, is yours.”

“ Ventre-saint-gris ! ” mentally ejaculated Henri. “ This is a novel reward for redressing my own injuries.”

“ How say you, messire ? ” demanded the Queen, impatiently.

“ Can you doubt my answer, Marguerite ? I accept your proposal. But what assurance have I of your sincerity ? ”

“ My word—the word of an injured and vindictive woman—the word of a Queen.”

“ When her injuries are redressed, the Queen may forget what the woman hath promised.”

“ The woman shall never forget that she *is* a Queen ; nor what is due to her as the sister, and the spouse of kings,” returned Marguerite haughtily. “ When we laid our commands upon the Baron de Viteaux to slay the ribald Du Guast ; when we made the same proposal to him, that we have made to you, *he* hesitated not.* But he had loved us long.”

“ *I have loved you yet longer, Marguerite,*” rejoined Henri in a troubled tone ; “ and I will do your bidding. But liken me not to the assassin Viteaux.”

* These details are not exaggerated, as the reader will perceive by glancing at the subjoined account of the assassination of the Sieur du Guast taken from the *Journal de Henri III*. “ La Reine Marguerite, piquée au vif, et animée encore par les plaintes de toutes celles que Du Guast avoit outragées, s’addressa à Guillaume Du Prat, Baron de Viteaux, alors caché à Paris, dans le Convent des Augustins, pour un meurtre, qu’il avoit commis quelque temps auparavant en la personne d’Antoine d’Alégre ; *elle l’engagea par ses caresses à devenir son vengeur.* Viteaux, pour faire son coup, choisit le premier de Novembre, vielle de la Fête des Morts, parce que le bruit de toutes les cloches de Paris qui se fait entendre alors, étoit propre à cacher le bruit inséparable de l’exécution de son entreprise. Il se rend, avec quelques autres sur le soir, au logis de Du Guast, monte dans sa chambre, et le trouve au lit, où il le perce de plusieurs coups.”

“ I blame not your incredulity, mes-
sire,” said the Queen, resuming all her soft-
ness and blandishment of manner; “ it could
not be otherwise. That I should affect to love
one, whom I have never before beheld—with
whose features—with whose name I am alike
unacquainted—were to belie myself—to de-
ceive you. But there is something in the
tone of your voice that (I know not why)
inspires me with confidence. I have unhe-
sitatingly trusted you with the hidden pur-
poses of my soul. As loyal knight you will
not betray them. Obey my behests, and I
will fulfil my promise. You ask for some
token of my truth. Here is one will remove
all doubts;” and as she spoke she took from
her neck a carcanet of pearls, the lustre of
which was eclipsed by the dazzling fairness
of her skin; “ this ornament was the gift of
Henri of Navarre.”

“ Diable!” ejaculated the King. “ *His* gift?”

“ On our espousals—it is yours.”

“ Could Henri of Navarre have anticipated

you would part with it thus, his hand should have been hacked off at the wrist, ere he had bestowed it."

" How ? "

" I crave your Majesty's pardon. I have a strange habit of putting myself in the situation of other people, and for the moment fancied myself your credulous husband."

" Will this token suffice ? " demanded Marguerite, impatiently.

" You yield it without regret ? "

" Without a sigh !—I would sacrifice my fame—my kingdom—my life at the shrine of vengeance ; and think you I should hesitate to part with the gift of one I never valued. Do not, however, mistake me, and deem this gage a light one. It is my fate ! With it you claim fulfilment of my promise. Or with it," added she, in an altered voice, " you ensure my destruction.—Are you content ? "

" Give me the chain."

" Remove your casque then, and with my own hand I will attach the collar to it."

Henri appeared irresolute.

“ Trifle not,” said the Queen; “ but to the lists. And then death to the traitor, and confusion to your faithless dame ! ”

“ Be it so,” replied the King, unhelming himself, and gazing sternly at his consort. “ Take back your own words, Marguerite,—confusion to my faithless dame ! ”

“ HENRI ! ” ejaculated the Queen, gazing at him as if she beheld a spectre. “ Pity!—pity ! ”

“ Be silent, Madame,” said the King; “ this is my retribution.”

Marguerite made an effort to control herself—but in vain. Her limbs failed her, and she sank senseless into the arms of La Rebourg, who most opportunely flew to her assistance.

“ Give me thy kerchief, ma mie,” said Henri to the Demoiselle; “ it shall be my gage instead of this polluted carcanet. And now thy hand—nay, thy lips, sweet one, we shall meet again, anon.”

“ Success attend your Majesty,” said La Rebours, as the King departed. “ Give me joy, Torigni,” added she, when the latter appeared, “ my fondest hopes are realized.”

“ In what way?” asked the Florentine.

“ Hush! her Majesty revives—the intelligence is not for her ears.”

“ Is he gone?” gasped Marguerite.

“ He has returned to the lists, Madame,” replied La Rebours.

“ And my gage?” asked the Queen.

“ Is there,” answered the attendant, pointing, maliciously, to the neglected pearls.

“ Assist me to that sauteuil, Torigni,” said the Queen, withdrawing herself from the support of La Rebours. “ If Crichton prove victorious in this conflict, bid the Demoiselle Esclairmonde attend me here. Leave me La Rebours. How I hate that minion,” added she, as the maid-of-honour left the chamber.

“ Not without cause, Madame,” returned Torigni significantly.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BARB.

— La seconde venue
Guerry encor, j'en ay bien souvenance,
L'autre rompit, et depuis contenance
N'ot son destrier à la lice approchier,
Et car long temps ne se peuvent touchier.

LOUIS DE BEAUVÉAU.

CRICTON, meantime, in answer to the defiance of the King of Navarre, instantly proceeded to the entrance of the lists, executing as he rode thither, so many graceful curvets and high passades (which latter, according to Pluvinel, constitute "*la vraye pierre de touche du bon Chevalier, et du bon cheval*") that the air resounded with the applause of the spectators, and the tide of

popular opinion, which a breath will ever turn, again ran high in his favour.

Stirred by their shouts, and still more elated by the prospect of an encounter with his kingly and chivalrous antagonist ; perceiving, also, that the Bourbon had dismounted, and that the pales (again hastily stretched across the area under the direction of the Vicomte de Joyeuse, and Montjoie) were not yet firmly fastened to their supporters, the Scot called to his esquire, and taking his spear, with the ostensible purpose of breathing his charger, performed a brilliant course alone.

Nothing could exceed the rapidity and dexterity with which this pass was made. The animal seemed to obey every impulse of his rider. Starting from his post with a snort of wild delight, he launched into the career as if he would have borne down all opposition by his fury. Crichton threw the rein upon his shoulder, and flung his heavy lance into the air—caught it—again tossed it aloft—and repeated this extraordinary feat for a

third time, ere the haunches of his steed seemed to stiffen into marble on his arrival at the point of rest. Universal acclamations rewarded this triumphant exhibition of knightly skill.

But the admiration of the beholders amounted to the most rapturous enthusiasm, as they witnessed what next ensued. The Scot shouted to the attendants, and in obedience to his command, the ring employed in the tourney was instantly attached to an elevated post, forming part of the framework of the lists. Executing a demi-volte with curvets, he again started on his career; again thrice hurled his spear aloft; and, maintaining throughout this gallant action an unaltered carriage of body, moving only his right arm, as occasion demanded, finally carried off the prize upon his lance's point! This performance (prolonged in description) was the work only of a few seconds.

The dames waved their kerchiefs; the sergents of the guard clashed their halberts;

the mob flung their caps into the air, without being so successful in regaining them as the Scot had been in the recovery of his spear ; the bosoms of the youthful nobles beat high with ardour and emulation ; even the members of the royal group were loud in their applauses.

“ *Honneur aux fils des preux !* ” exclaimed Brantôme, with transport, “ that course was bravely executed.”

“ A marvellous exploit, certes, my dear Abbé,” said Henri. “ Your valiant uncle, the Sieur de La Châteigneraye, with all his address in horsemanship, and expertness in the management of arms, could scarce have achieved that amazing feat.”

“ It may not occur to your Majesty’s recollection, but precisely the same feat, as that we have just witnessed, *was* performed by the Sieur de la Châteigneraye in the presence of your royal father,” returned Brantôme. “ My brave uncle has been surpassed by no knight, living or dead, in vigour and address.”

“ Save by Gui de Chabot, Abbé,” cried the Jester, with a scoffing grimace. “ The *coup de Jarnac*, hath passed into a proverb; it will be fortunate for our dear Henriot if the *coup de Crichton* do not supersede it.”

“ A truce to this!” said the King, “ thy jesting is ill-timed.”

“ Good counsel is generally so, compère,” retorted Chicot. “ If, however, after this specimen of Crichton’s consummate skill, like yon unknown knight, you are so madly-adventurous as to tilt with him, I shall say of you, what one wiser than I am, said of the King your father—

Sire, vous n'estes plus, vous n'estes plus que cire!”

“ You shall say what you please of us, scélérat,” returned the good-humoured monarch, laughing; “ if we *do* hazard the safety of our royal person, and endanger our hitherto untarnished reputation as a knight, by entering the lists with this invincible Scot, whom Sathan certainly abetteth. But see! his foolhardy

challenger again takes the field,—ha ! mort dieu ! what is this ? Our Béarnais (if he *must* be so designated) tears the silken streamer from his spear, and casts it beneath his charger's hoofs."

" Observe, also, my liege, that he replaces it with a kerchief," interposed Brantôme ; " and note, moreover, that this kerchief hath not the golden fringe, which is worn by the Queen of Navarre. Her Majesty, whose colours he hath rashly assumed, has evidently refused him a favour—ha !—ha ! "

" There is nothing extraordinary in that, Seigneur Abbé, seeing that the Admirable Crichton is in the case," returned Chicot. " I warrant me, if *thou* hadst been his opponent, this cavalier's suit would not have been fruitless. Let it suffice that he *hath* a gage—no matter what—or whence obtained—

What a queen hath denied him,
A *quean* hath supplied him :
And the favour he beareth
No favourite shareth :

His choice is a right one
With kerchief a white one
To tilt against Crichton!"'

" By Phœbus ! gossip !" exclaimed the King, " thou rhymest like Frère Jean, *en cramoisi*. But hark ! the charge is sounded. Montjoie's arrangements are completed. Al-lons ! messeigneurs—hola ! Du Halde, my warder ! Hast thou contrived Ruggieri's escape ?" added he in a whisper.

" He is already without the Louvre, my liege," returned the chief valet in the same tone.

" The fair Esclairmonde is ours, then !" ejaculated Henri with triumph. And followed by his favourites he proceeded to the canopy and took his seat upon the throne.

By this time the area of the tilt-yard was cleared of its numerous intruders. The marshals of the field hastened to their tribunal ; Montjoie hurried to the estrade reserved for himself and his attendants ; while each

cavalier sought to secure for himself an advantageous position for the approaching spectacle. For the moment all was bustle and clamour. But above the shouts of the various officers, stationed (it would seem in all ages) to preserve order, and increase confusion ; above the trampling and neighing of steeds, and the jingling of martial equipments, arose the loud fanfare of the trumpeter, making ‘ young pulses dance ’ with its stirring notes.

As the blast died away profound silence ensued. The two champions and their esquires alone occupied either extremity of the barriers. Each regarded his antagonist with curiosity. On the part of Crichton the feeling was that of enthusiastic delight : on that of Henri of Bourbon admiration was chilled by deep sense of wrong. Nevertheless his frank and noble nature could not resist the Scot’s high claims to consideration ; and as he narrowly scrutinized his matchless symmetry of figure, and consummate grace of demeanour, he who was no harsh judge of

woman, felt half-disposed to overlook his consort's fault.

“*Ventre-saint-gris!*” he mentally ejaculated, “a likely galliard to please the fancy of a Queen—and worth a thousand such migniard voluptuaries as the balladin La Môle, or that grand dégouté Turenne. I could forgive his attentions to Marguerite. But there is our fair cousin of Condé—I *must* punish his presumption in that quarter.—Sa ha! the devil is in this steed.”

Crichton now drew his visor over his glowing cheek, and repressing the tumultuous emotions of his heart, with a light and steady hand placed his lance in its rest. The trumpet sounded for the second time; and Henri was about to follow the Scot's example, in expectation of the signal of assault, when affrighted by the kerchief fluttering over his head, his fiery charger, disregarding all restraint, broke from his post, and dashed headlong into the area.

Expert in all martial exercises, the chival-

rous Bourbon was one of the most perfect horsemen of his time, and his arm was endowed with no ordinary vigour; but neither his skill, nor his strength availed him on the present emergency. Encumbered by his lance, which he was unwilling to throw aside, he could only employ his left hand in coercion—while, deeply mortified and irritated at the occurrence, his efforts were in the first place directed rather to the punishment than the subjection of his unruly steed;—and this made matters worse. Each application of the spur was followed by a fierce and violent plunge. The infuriated animal reared, yerked, winced, and resorted to every vicious practice and stratagem to dislodge his rider. In this he failed. But in his turn, his rider failed in compelling him to approach the lists.

At this juncture, and just as the Monarch, full of wrath against his counsellor Rosni, began to despair of accomplishing his point, assistance was afforded him from a quarter

whence it could have been least anticipated. Perceiving the Bourbon's inability to govern his charger, Crichton rode towards him—and in a tone of the highest courtesy, professed to exchange steeds with him ; expressing, at the same time, his perfect conviction that he could achieve the animal's subjection, and carry him safely through the course.

“ By the soul of Bayard !” returned the Bourbon with equal courtesy, “ fame hath not belied you, Chevalier Crichton. Your proffer is worthy of a brighter age of chivalry—and should have been made to a worthier knight than I may pretend to be. In acceding to your proposal I feel that I acknowledge my defeat. In any case you are the victor in point of generosity. Nor will I by a refusal rob you of additional honour.” Saying which he flung himself from his charger's back.

“ It follows not, because I may be the more expert horseman, that I should also prove the more expert tilter,” returned Crichton, dismounting.

“ If you overcome the impetuosity of this foward beast you will accomplish a feat more difficult than that of Alexander of Macedon,” rejoined the Bourbon. “ But if you succeed in bringing him to the pales, look well to yourself—I promise you the reception due to so valiant a champion :—

Les plus jolis n'ont pas à leur plaisirance
Aucunefois l'honneur et le renom.”

“ You will find me no fainéant, Sir Knight,” replied Crichton, “ Nor do I think so lightly of your prowess, as to neglect your caution.”

At this moment the Baron de Rosni, attended by Montjoie and Joyeuse rode up to them.

“ Sire,” said Rosni, in a whisper, “ I pray you take my steed.”

“ Stand back, Sir!” returned the Bourbon, coldly.

“ Chevalier Crichton,” said Rosni turning

to the Scot, “ mount not that ungovernable horse—my charger is at your service.”

Crichton replied by vaulting into the saddle of the king of Navarre, and giving the rein to the barb, he careered round the tilt-yard, as if he was borne by one of the winged horses of the sun.

“ Courage, mon Admirable,” cried Joyeuse, looking after him, with a smile.

Vain were the efforts of the nigh frantic steed to shake his firm-seated rider;—vainly did he renew his former struggles;—he had to strive against one with whom contention was ineffectual. Crichton, for the moment, allowed him to expend his fire. He then struck his spurs fiercely into his sides, and compelled him to execute upwards of twenty caprioles in a breath. His fury now visibly abated; and the Scot completed his mastery by another career, and a swift succession of curvets. The next moment the animal stood controlled and motionless at the entrance of the lists.

The loudest plaudits would have followed this achievement had not all clamour been interdicted during the actual progress of jousts. As it was, an irrepressible murmur testified the wonderment and delight of the spectators.

The clarion now sounded for the third time, and the combatants started on their career. Both lances were splintered by the vehement shock of their encounter. But no injury was sustained on either side. A similar result followed the second atteinte.

“ Give me that painted spear, it is of tougher wood,” said Crichton, to his esquire, while the trumpet was blown for the third assault. And couching his lance, as he again sprang forward, he directed it, with unerring aim, against the crest of his antagonist’s morion.

The result of this career was decisive. The shock was more violent than those of the preceding rencounters. The lance of the Bourbon, whose mark had been the

centre of the Scot's helm, again shivered to the handle; while the stroke of Crichton, into which he had thrown all his force, would unquestionably have unhorsed his adversary, had not the helmet of the monarch, which had never been firmly fastened since his interview with his Queen, yielded to the blow, and rolled to the ground.

“ Bon dieu !” exclaimed Henri III., rising, “ *it is* the Béarnais—*it is* our brother of Navarre. We should recognise that Bourbon nose among a thousand. What ho!—our steed! our steed — Where is our mother?—where is her Majesty, Catherine de Medicis ? We would speak with her, ere we confront the hardy traitor. Surround us, messeigneurs, and let our body-guard be trebled. Some conspiracy may—nay, *must* be on foot. What think you of it, Villequier, and you, cousin of Nevers? See to the outlets of the tilt-yard. Suffer none to go forth, or to enter. By Saint Hubert ! we have snared a tiger.”

Crichton, meantime, had reined in his steed, and returned to the Bourbon.

“Sire!” said he, speaking in a low determined tone. “I have, unwittingly, betrayed you to your foes. But if you will confide in me, I pledge myself to accomplish your deliverance.”

“My counsel to your Majesty,” interposed Rosni, “would be to hasten to the king your brother, and if possible obtain permission to depart with your escort ere he have time to confer with the Queen-Mother. It is your only hope.”

Henri averted his head from his confidant. “Chevalier Crichton,” said he, addressing the Scot. “I will trust you. There is my hand.”

“If I take it not, Sire,” replied Crichton, “your Majesty will understand my motive, when I say that the eyes of Catherine de Medicis are upon us.”

“True,” replied the Bourbon, “and those of our fair cousin of Condé—hem! Chevalier.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ENGLISHMAN.

Where'er I wander, boast of this I can,
Though banish'd, yet a true-born Englishman.

SHAKSPEARE. *Richard II.*

THE majestic and remarkable countenance of Henri of Navarre (a face once seen, not readily forgotten) had been instantly recognised by the majority of the assemblage ; and such of the crowd, as were unacquainted with his features, speedily gathered his title from the general vociferations. Coupled with various and most discordant epithets, his

name now resounded from every quarter. Some applauded his bravery and bonhom-mie ; some derided his imprudence and teme-
rity ; others railed bitterly and loudly against
his heresies, and apostacy from the religion of
Rome (whose tenets Henri, not over-scrupu-
lous on matters of faith, embraced or re-
nounced, as circumstances required;) others,
on the contrary, silently and devoutly hailed
him as the champion of their creed. A few
there were, who fancied they discovered in
his sudden appearance in the midst of his
foes, a signal for an insurrection and mass-a-
cre, in retaliation for the sanguinary day of
Saint-Barthélémi, and held themselves in
readiness to obey his mandates; while another,
and more numerous faction, deeply inter-
ested in all events affecting their project,
regarded the occurrence as singularly inaus-
picious. Catherine de Medicis, alone, viewed
the discovery without surprise or dismay.

Popular by his affability, generosity and
manliness, (qualities, which afterwards won

for him the affectionate appellation—yet hal-lowing his name in the breast of every true Frenchman—of “*le bon roi* ;”) the Bourbon, even during the period of his detention within the Louvre, had attached no inconsiderable party to his cause; and amongst the youthful, and light-hearted nobles, then present, there were many, whose zeal would have prompted them to declare themselves in his favour, had any attempt been made upon his life. The situation, therefore, of the intrepid monarch, who, attended by Crichton and Rosni, remained unmoved, with his hand upon the pommel of his sword, and a smile upon his lips, was not fraught with so much peril as at first sight it would appear to be.

Joyeuse and D’Épernon, with several of the immediate and loyal adherents of Henri III., flew to each outlet of the tilt-yard, re-inforced the guard, and issued the King’s commands to allow none to enter or to pass forth from the arena.

Before these orders could be obeyed, a

man of robust appearance, and square, stout make, rushed upon the ancient, or standard bearer of the guard, plucked from his side his long two-handed sword, leapt over the palisades of the lists, and followed by a huge dog made the best of his way in the direction of Henri of Navarre.

The action was too suddenly, and too swiftly executed to be prevented. But the flying figure of the man having caught the eye of the Vicomte de Joyeuse, he struck his spurs into his charger, and dashed in pursuit with the intention of cutting him down. Nothing could have prevented the fugitive's destruction but the timely assistance afforded by his four-footed companion. Just as Joyeuse had overtaken him, and was about to discharge a blow, which must have proved fatal, the career of his steed was checked by the dog, whose fangs were suddenly fixed within the nostrils of the terrified animal. At the same moment the man turned and stood upon his defence.

With his eyes starting from their sockets, his veins distended, his flanks quivering, his head borne to the ground by the weight of the dog, and his nostrils gushing with blood, the poor horse uttered a shrill neigh, sounding almost like a scream ; but attempted neither to move, nor to free himself from his fierce assailant. Exasperated beyond endurance at the condition of his steed, Joyeuse directed his next assault against the hound.

“ Hold !” exclaimed Blount, (for the reader, we imagine, will have surmised that it was the Englishman). “ Touch a hair of my dog’s hide, and by Saint Dunstan ! I will no longer hold my hand.”

Joyeuse replied by aiming a downward blow at the Englishman. Blount received the stroke upon the edge of his sword, and returned it with such good effect that the Vicomte’s rapier was beaten from his grasp, and whirled to some distance.

“ Call off thy dog, villain,” shouted Joyeuse, furiously, “ or thou shall repent it. Ha !

Vivedieu!" added he, as several of his attendants rode up, "seize him! if he resists, show him no quarter—yield, madman!"

"Never!" replied Blount, stoutly, "were they ten times their number. I ask no quarter, and will yield to no man, or men. It shall not be said that an Englishman sued for mercy, while his hand could wield a sword. Come on, then, my masters—one, and all—and try the force of an English arm. Your sires have felt the weight of our blows at Créci and Poitiers—and their sons shall find that our bull-dog breed is not degenerated, or his country disgraced in the person of Simon Blount."

"Why do you hesitate?" thundered Joyeuse.

"*Why* do they hesitate?" echoed Blount, in a taunting tone, at the same time flourishing his tremendous blade with the greatest ease over his head. "Because I *am* an Englishman. They are six and I am one. They are mounted, I on foot. They have

sword and partisan—I sword only. They are Frenchmen—I am an Englishman. By my troth! we are fairly matched.”

“ Silence him !” cried Joyeuse.

But this was no such easy matter. The inert, but sturdy Islander was now fairly roused from his habitual lethargy. His arm and tongue were alike in motion. He answered with a roar of defiance.

“ Silence me! quotha.—E'en let them, if they can! But they have good reasons for their forbearance. Their memories serve them too faithfully. They recollect the by-gone times of the Regent Bedford—when a French noble was obliged to doff his cap to an English churl. Old Rabelais has told them of our thirst—and at whose cost we allayed it.”

“ Cravens! will ye bear this ?” cried Joyeuse. “ He says truly—ye are six to one.”

“ It was the same at Azincourt,” retorted Blount,—“ and ye know by whom that day was won.”

“ That day was not won by big words, sirrah,” rejoined Joyeuse, amazed at the Englishman’s audacity.

“ Right !” exclaimed Blount, waving his sword, as if selecting a mark. “ I thank you for the hint. I have already talk’d too much.”

“ Despatch this hound with your pike, Baptiste,” shouted Joyeuse ; “ and liberate my wounded charger.”

The man instantly obeyed, and thrust his partisan through the throat of Druid. Severely, but not mortally wounded, the courageous brute still maintained his grasp.

“ Hew him in pieces ! ” vociferated Joyeuse. “ It is the nature of the accursed animal to cling thus, while aught of life remains.”

Another man-at-arms now took up the attack ; and in his endeavour to cleave asunder the dog’s scull, which he was only prevented from effecting by the resistance made by his thick hide, struck off his right ear and fore paw.

Blinded by his own blood, and frighfully mutilated, Druid kept his hold with unflinching tenacity.

“ Saint-George for England !” shouted Blount. And, as he spoke, his sword whistled through the air and the man-at-arms fell headless to the ground. “ Here is a sweet morsel for thee, Druid,” added he with a savage laugh, at the same time spurning with his heel the gory head, which had dropped near him. “ Come hither, sirrah, quick !”

Obedient to his master’s call, the dog yielded that compliance which he had refused to commands, enforced by sharpest blows ; and, at once, set free the Vicomte’s charger. Uttering a piercing cry, the latter animal galloped, with uncontrollable speed, to the farther end of the lists ; where, fortunately, his career was stopped by one of the heralds, and Joyeuse enabled to dismount.

Blount’s assailants were now reduced to five. But he was on all sides surrounded ; and fresh foes were pouring against him from

each quarter of the tilt-yard. Undismayed by numbers, and supported by his constitutional phlegm, he viewed his probable end with indifference, and resolved to meet it as became a brave man, and a denizen of that Island nook, which, in the words of the greatest of her sons, “ breedeth very valiant children.”

“ Would I were with my back against a wall,” thought he, “ I would take far greater odds, and give them ruder welcome than they bring. As it is, with this long poking-iron so luckily obtained, I will carbonado some of their doublets after a fashion, in which they were never slashed before. *Gules* shall predominate over *or* and *azure* in their emblazoned coats.”

And as these reflections ran through his mind, his sword again described a tremendous circle, in the course of which it encountered the various weapons of his antagonists, who were thrusting and striking at him from all points, and finally descending upon the

shoulder of the halberdier, by whom Druid had been first wounded, the man, cloven almost to the girdle, fell to the ground.

“ *Habet!*” cried Blount laughing, and again whirling round his ensanguined sword.

In the midst of this gladiatorial display, which was regarded by the beholders, even of the gentler sex, with the same fierce and thrilling interest, that prevailed amongst the witnesses of the terrible entertainments held within a Roman circus, we shall take breath for an instant to describe more fully the weapon used by our English combatant. We have before adverted to the treatise of Giacomo Di Grassi,*—

— a man of great defence,
Expert in battles, and in deeds of armes—

and we shall now resort to the manner of wielding the two-edged sword, as delivered by the Italian Professor. In the words of his quaint translator we are told that

* Giacomo di Grassi, his true Arte of Defence. First

“ one may with it (as a galleon among manie gallies) resist manie swords, or other weapons. And it is accustomed to be carried in the citie, as well by night, as by day, when it so chaunceth that a few are constrainyd to withstand a great manie. And because his weight and bigness require great strength, therefore those only are allotted to the handling thereof, which are mightie and bigge to behould, great and stronge in bodie, of stout and valiant courage. Who (forasmuch as they are to encounter manie, and to the end they may strike the more safelie, and amaze them with the furie of the sword) do altogether use to deliver great edge-blows, downright and reversed, fetching a full circle or compass therein, staying themselves sometimes upon one foot, sometimes on the other, utterlie neglecting to thrust, and persuading themselves that the thrust serveth to amaze one

written in Italian by the foresaid Author, and Englished by I. G. Gentleman, 1594.

man onelie, but these edge-blows are of force to encounter manie. The which manner of skirmishing, besides that it is most gallant to behold, being accompanied with exceeding swiftness in deliverie (for otherwise it worketh no such effect) it is also most profitable, not properly of itselfe, but because men considering the furie of the sword, which greatly amaseth them, are not resolute to doe that, which otherwise they could not choose but doe.” All that Di Grassi has here so graphically depicted, was performed by Blount—and more than all this; for so great was his activity and dexterity—so nimble was he in the management and recovery of his weapon—so tremendous was its sweep, “being of the compasse of ten arms or more,” that in the space of a few moments he had disabled a third opponent and beaten off the others. “Hurrah!” shouted he, with lusty lungs, tossing, as he spoke, his bonnet into the air, hurrah! for England, and “God save Queen Bess!”

At the same time, as if partaking of his master's triumph, Druid up-turned his mangled visage and uttered a loud and exulting howl.

"Poor fellow!" said Blount—his heart smiting him as he heard this sound. "Thou art sorely hurt; but I have amply avenged thee," added he, looking grimly around, "we can at least die together—thou wouldst never survive thy master."

The faithful dog understood this appeal. His fierce howl changed to a piteous moan.

"Peace, sirrah!" cried Blount angrily, "no whimpering. Thou art wounded, or I would bestow a buffet on thee for thy cowardice. An English bull-dog — and whine!"

The red flame in the dog's eyes at this reproof blazed yet more fiercely—and his fangs were instantly displayed.

"Why that is right," cried Blount, in a tone of approval. Upon which, shouldering his gigantic blade, and keeping his eye stea-

dily fixed upon the movements of his foes, though menaced with immediate, and, it would seem, inevitable destruction, in order to show his utter disregard of the peril in which he stood, he began to carol in a rough, but not inharmonious voice a few lines of the following homely stave :—

Druid.

I.

Through the world have I wandered wide,
With never a wife, or a friend by my side,
Save Druid ! a comrade staunch and tried :—

Troll on away !

Druid, my dog, is a friend in need,
Druid, my dog, is a friend *indeed*,
Druid, my dog, is of English breed !

More need I say ?

Troll on away !

II.

Druid would perish *my* life to save,
For faithful Druid like fate *I'd* brave,
The dog and his master shall find one grave !

Troll on away !

Life ! I heed not its loss a feather!
And when black Atropos snaps *my* tether,
She must cut *twice*—we'll die together !
No more I'll say.
Troll on away !

In enumerating the good and evil qualities of Henri III., we have before mentioned his singular predilection for the canine species. His attachment to dogs was as strong as his aversion to cats. Upon the commencement of the skirmish just described, the royal train, by their Sovereign's command, had halted ; and Henri's attention, throughout, had been attracted towards Druid, whose courage and fidelity he could not sufficiently admire and applaud. It was owing to this circumstance that Blount remained so long unmolested.

“ What would I give for a follower so faithful ! ” said the King. “ Such a hound were worth a whole pack of barbets and spaniels, with my two favourites Citron and Chatelard at their head. I *must* possess him. Miron will speedily heal his wounds. But

how shall we get rid of his master, without doing the dog further mischief?"

"Let your arquebussiers fire upon the knave, my liege," said the Duc de Nevers, in a low tone, "and, if a stray ball *should* reach the Béarnais, your Majesty will have an enemy the less. Maurevert is behind us, armed with the same caliver with which Coligni was wounded. A look will suffice for *him*."

"Thanks, fair cousin," returned Henri, "but we are in no such hurry. We see no reason to suspect treachery on the part of our brother of Navarre. He appears as much diverted as ourself with this fray. Besides," added he, smiling, "we have not yet consulted our mother upon the expediency of a step so important in its consequences as that would be."

"I will answer for her Majesty's approval," returned the Duke hastily.

"*You!*" exclaimed the King, with a look of surprise. "Are you our mother's confidant, Monsieur le Duc? What reason have

you to suppose she would desire the death of the Béarnais?"

"Because," replied Chicot boldly, "he is like the wrong king unexpectedly turned up at Primero; he spoils the order of the cards, and ruins the game."

"Parbleu! what game, compère?" demanded the Monarch.

"Your Majesty forgets the hound you are anxious to save," interrupted the Duke, darting an angry glance at the Jester, "another moment and it will be too late."

"Right!" cried Henri, "command yon men-at-arms to stay their swords, and let a company of arquebussiers advance."

The King's orders were instantly obeyed. The soldiers, who had rushed to the assistance of their comrades, reluctantly withdrew. A dozen arquebussiers, attired in richly-emblazoned doublets of crimson frieze, girded in at the waist by broad leather belts, from which depended matches of lighted tow; with great ruffs round their throats, pa^{le}

green hose upon their lower limbs, and roses, almost as large as the shoes they covered, upon their feet; each carrying on his right arm a huge bell-mouthed musquet, and on his left a forked staff intended to support it — this troop, headed by Maurevert, the hired assassin of Charles IX. (and surnamed *le Tueur du Roi*) swiftly advanced, ranged themselves in two lines by the side of the King, planted their forks in the ground, pointed their artillery against the Englishman's breast, and awaited only the royal mandate to fire.

Blount witnessed these proceedings without dismay. When he saw the death-dealing tubes levelled against him, he stooped to the ground, and catching Druid in his arms, breathed the words of his song—

“ The dog and his master shall find one grave ! ”

fully prepared to meet his fate.

“ Hold ! ” exclaimed Henri, “ some fiend hath put it into the knave's head to defeat

our object. Bid him surrender at discretion, Maurevert. Once get possession of his dog, and deal with him as you think fitting. But I charge you, on your lives, do the animal no further injury."

Maurevert stepped forwards. Blount, however, sturdily refused to yield up his sword.

At this moment, and while Henri, ever irresolute when resolution was required, hesitated to give the signal to the arquebusiers, Crichton rode up.

"I will disarm him, Sire," said he, "if I have your Majesty's permission to do so."

"Gramercy! mon cher, you have our permission at once, and to slay him, too, if it please you, provided you harm not the dog."

"One will scarce succumb without the other, I suspect, my liege," replied the Scot.
"We shall see."

Saying which he dismounted, and giving his steed to the charge of an attendant, advanced towards Blount.

"Are you mad?" said he sternly, as he

arrived within a few paces of the Englishman, “ that you adopt this braggart posture ? Yield ! and I may yet preserve your life.”

“ I should hold it foul scorn were such word to pass my lips, even at *your* bidding, Chevalier Crichton,” replied Blount, doggedly.

“ Fool ! ” said the Scot, in a low and significant tone, “ this is but a feint. Throw down your sword. I will be your safeguard.”

“ Were I to do so it would *seem* as if I yielded,” rejoined Blount. “ And I had rather die a thousand deaths than these accursed Frenchmen should be able to crow over me.”

“ Defend yourself, then,” exclaimed Crichton, plucking his rapier from the scabbard.

“ If I fall by your hands I shall die the death I would have chosen,” replied Blount. “ Yet think not I will perish tamely. I hold it too good luck to cross swords with you, not to approve myself worthy of the honour. But our blades are ill-matched. I cannot fight without equal arms.”

"I have helm and corslet," answered Crichton; "you have neither buff jerkin, nor steel cap. The advantage is on my side."

"Down, Druid," said Blount, quitting his hold of the dog, "stir not—use neither tooth nor claw. Chevalier Crichton," added he, in a tone of some emotion, "if I fall—this hound—"

"I understand," replied Crichton. "I will be his master."

"No!" said Blount, "I meant not that—despatch him."

"Waste no more words in this idle parley," returned Crichton, fiercely. "My blows are for men, not dogs. Again, I say, defend yourself."

"Saint George for England!" shouted Blount, fetching a compass with his sword that dazzled the eyes of the beholders like a flash of lightning. But rapid as was this circle—not so swift was it as the corresponding movement of the Scot. Instead of

endeavouring to avoid the blow, or to encounter its force, where it was most dangerous, at a distance, he at once rushed in upon the Englishman, met the edge of his weapon in mid sweep with a stoccado, and nothing daunted that his own rapier was hurled from his grasp, clutched with his left hand the wrist of his adversary, and with his right fearlessly catching hold of his enormous blade, by a violent downward jerk, wrested it from his gripe.

Thus far Druid had obeyed his master's orders, and crouched, inoffensively at his feet—but now instinctively comprehending his danger he flew with such violence against Crichton's legs, that had they not been plated in steel, he must have withdrawn his attack from Blount to defend himself from his follower.

“Lie still, sir,” cried the Englishman furiously. And setting his foot upon the dog's back, he pressed him, notwithstanding his desperate struggles, forcibly to the ground.

" You are the victor," continued he, addressing Crichton, " strike ! "

" I have accomplished all I desired," replied the Scot, " in disarming you."

" I yield not," said Blount, sullenly. " You had better finish me."

The words were scarcely uttered, when his arms were suddenly seized from behind by a couple of halberdiers, who had stolen upon him unawares ; and a stout sword-belt, slipped over his wrists, and drawn tightly together, prevented any further resistance on his part. At the same moment a sash, tied in a noose, and flung over the head of Druid by a third man-at-arms, made the brave animal, likewise, a prisoner.

" Harm neither," said Crichton, addressing the guards ; " but await his Majesty's pleasure—and see ! he approaches."

" Draw near to me, I pray you, Chevalier Crichton," said Blount, gazing earnestly at the Scot, " I have something to communicate, which, in my confusion, I had forgotten.

“I know what you would say,” returned Crichton, making a gesture of silence, “all is lost!”

“The devil!” exclaimed Blount, with a look of disappointment, “my labour then has been in vain. It was merely to bring you these tidings that I adventured within the lists.”

“Heed not that, good Blount, but pacify your dog,” said Crichton, noticing, with uneasiness, the violent efforts of the animal to free himself, by which he was well-nigh strangled; “on *his* life hangs your own.”

“True,” replied Blount, taking the words literally, “it does so.”

Upon which he addressed an angry declamation to Druid, who instantly became passive in the hands of his captor.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TWO HENRIS.

Premier Soldat. Le Béarnais a peut-être promis de retourner à confesse. Ca serait heureux, tout de même—il me fait l'effet d'un bon compère de roi!

Deuxième Soldat. Le nôtre n'a pas mauvais air non plus sur sa grande jument—mais il sent trop le jasmin.

LA MORT DE HENRI III. *L. Vitet.*

UNWILLING to hold any private conference with the King of Navarre, until he should receive some intimation of Catherine's disposition towards him; and “perplexed in the extreme,” that no message had, as yet, arrived from her Majesty, Henri III., uncertain what line of policy he ought to pursue, and glad of any pretext to gain further time, instead of advancing to question the Bourbon, as he had originally intended to do, bent his course

towards the captive Englishman. This plan, however, was defeated. Henri of Navarre, yielding tardy compliance with the earnest solicitations of Rosni, (who represented, in the most moving terms, the perils and calamities, in which his present fatal obstinacy must, necessarily, involve himself, his people, and his religion,) came suddenly to the resolution of throwing himself upon the generosity of his royal brother. Accordingly, when Henri III. turned aside to confer with Blount, he struck spurs into his charger, and rode towards him.

A greeting of apparently fraternal warmth passed between the two Monarchs. Though each, in secret, distrusted the other, both deemed it prudent to assume an air of unbounded confidence and good-will. Dissimulation formed no part of the Bourbon's frank and loyal character. But his long experience of the perfidy and insincerity of the race of Valois; while it prevented him from being Henri's dupe;

satisfied him that any advantage which might accrue to him from the interview, could only be attained by the employment of similar artifice. Throwing himself, therefore, instantly from his steed, he attempted, with the greatest cordiality, to take the hand of the King, with the intention of proffering the customary salutation.

Henri III., however, drew back his steed as he approached.

“ Your pardon, my brother,” said he, with a gracious smile, “ we would cut off our right hand could we suspect it of heresy ; nor can we consent to take your’s, tainted as it is with that contagious leprosy, unless we first receive assurance from your lips that you are come hither, like the prodigal son, to confess your indiscretions, to implore our forgiveness, and to solicit to be received once more into the indulgent bosom of our holy Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman Church.”

“ Sire,” replied the Bourbon, “ I own that

I am in much the same predicament as the unfortunate wight, to whom you have likened me. I have, at this moment, more nose than kingdom—more care than coin—more hope than faith—more regard for your Majesty than the religion you propose——”

“ And more regard for your body than your soul, I fear, my brother,” interrupted Henri III., gravely shaking his head, and telling a bead or two upon his rosary.

“ That is to say he has more regard for his mistresses than his Queen,” said Chicot. “ You are right, compère. Our Béarnais will never be saved unless the good old faith of the Gentiles comes round again, and new altars are raised at Cnydos and Paphos, to the goddess he worships.”

“ Certes, thou malapert knave, I am a heretic in no creed in which beauty is concerned,” replied the Bourbon, laughing; “ and amid yon gallery of fair Saints, there is not one to whom I would refuse my adoration.”

“ I could point out one,” cried the Jester.

“ I defy thee,” said the Bourbon.

“ Your Queen !” returned Chicot.

Even Henri III. could not help joining in the mirth occasioned by this sally of the Jester.

“ Ribald !” exclaimed the Bourbon, laughing louder than the rest ; “ thy fool’s cap alone protects thee from my resentment..”

“ My fool’s calotte is a better defence than many a knight’s casque,” answered Chicot.

“ For the love I bear her Majesty of Navarre, I will exchange it for thine, and throw my marotte into the bargain. Thou wilt need both on thy next encounter with Crichton.”

“ Wilt thou throw thyself into the bargain, knave,” asked the Bourbon, “ and follow my fortunes ? ”

“ Of a surety, no !” replied the Jester “ That were to quit the master for the valet; the provost for the prisoner; the falconer for the quarry.”

“ Pardieu ! compère,” said Henri III., in

a tone of raillery, “ art thou so blind to thy own interest as to tarry in our service, when an offer so brilliant is made thee by our brother of Navarre? Bethink thee of the eminence, to which thy wisdom and decorum must, necessarily, promote thee, amongst the synods of the Huguenots, and the sage councils of the court of Pau! ”

“ I never leap in the dark, gossip,” replied Chicot. “ It were the province of a wise man to go in quest of danger. I am a fool, and prefer safe quarters at home.”

“ Wholesome advice may be gathered even from the mouth of fools you perceive, my brother,” said Henri III. “ May we now inquire to what fortunate circumstance we owe the unexpected happiness of this visit? We have been singularly mis-informed about you, and your proceedings. We are told you are an enemy—we find you our best of friends. We learn that you are at the head of a hostile army, putting our towns and subjects to fire and sword—we find you as blithe companion

as ever, and almost unattended. Our last accounts are, that you are barricaded within the walls of Pau, or Nérac; our next are gathered from your own lips within the walls of the Louvre. See how one may be deceived."

"Your Majesty is not deceived in my expressions of friendship," replied the Bourbon, cordially. "Will it please you to command your gentlemen to stand further off?"

"Excuse us, my brother, if we venture to retain our attendants," replied Henri III. "We are curious to question this bold knave," added he, glancing at Blount. "You may reserve your tale if you please for the ear of our confessor, whom you will permit us to recommend in the hope of accomplishing your conversion."

"Your confessor, Sire!" ejaculated the Bourbon, knitting his brow.

"And at the tail of the priest the headsman," added Chicot.

"Ha!" ejaculated the Bourbon.

"You will not then fail to profit by his

instruction, and for the third time, get rid of any scruples of conscience," returned Chicot. "The laconic message of his late Majesty, Charles IX., to your cousin, Henri of Condé, had other merits besides its conciseness."

"What message was that, gossip?" asked Henri III., affecting ignorance.

"*Messe, mort ou Bastille!*" replied the Jester. "Our Béarnais will remember it by the token, that about the same time he abjured his own Calvinistic heresies."

"Ventre-saint-gris! thou scurrilous varlet," cried the Bourbon fiercely; "if thou darest to push thy mischievous pleasantry further, not even thy own insignificance, or thy royal master's presence, shall prevent my inflicting due chastisement upon thee."

Alarmed by the menacing aspect of the King of Navarre, with a grimace of mixed terror and defiance, Chicot, like a snarling cur, apprehensive of the heels of a noble steed he has annoyed beyond endurance,

now turned tail, and retreated to the protection of his master, who was secretly delighted with this specimen of his skill in the “art of ingeniously tormenting.”

“ Since you decline answering our inquiries respecting the motive of your visit, my brother,” said Henri III., in his blandest accents, “ we will not press the point. But we trust you will not object to remaining near our person till we return to the banquet?”

“ Your Majesty has only to command me.”

“ And as you have no attendants excepting the Baron de Rosni, we give you your choice of six of our own gentlemen, who will continue constantly by your side.”

“ I understand your Majesty. I am a prisoner.”

“ I said not so, my brother. Choose your attendants.”

“ My choice is readily made, Sire. I shall name but one—the Chevalier Crichton. I leave the nomination of the others to *him*.”

“ *Fænum habet in cornu,*” muttered Chicot, “ a wittol’s choice !”

“ You could not have made a better election,” observed Henri III., with a smile.

“ I think not,” said the Bourbon.

“ I am *sure* not,” added Chicot. “ Forgiveness becomes a Christian Prince. Madame Marguerite will highly applaud your generosity and placability.”

“ Peace, droll !” said Henri III. “ And now, my ‘brother,’ continued he, in the same honeyed tone, which he had previously adopted, and which by those who knew him was more dreaded than the most violent burst of indignation ; “ as the jousts are at an end, and you will have no further occasion for it, we entreat you to resign your sword to the custody of him, whom you have appointed your principal attendant.”

“ My sword, Sire !” exclaimed the Bourbon, recoiling.

“ Your sword, my brother,” repeated Henri III., blandly.

The king of Navarre looked around. On all sides he was invested by danger. The whole circle of the area in which he stood bristled with pikes and spears. Above the halberts of the Switzers rose the javelins of the Scottish guards; and above the javelins of the Scots gleamed the long lances of D'Épernon's gallant Gascon troop. Here was stationed a company of archers—there a band of arquebussiers. On the right were arrayed the youthful nobles under the command of the Vicomte de Joyeuse, readily to be distinguished by their gorgeous apparelling, and fluttering pennons; on the left was drawn out the sumptuous retinue of the Duc de Nevers. Nor was this all. A nearer circle of the King's body-guard encompassed him. Every hand was upon a sword-hilt — every glance fixed upon him. As he carelessly noted all this hostile preparation, the Bourbon turned towards his counsellor Rosni, who stood

leaning upon the handle of his sword immediately behind him. Not a word—not a sign was exchanged between them. But the monarch understood the meaning of the cold stern look of his counsellor. At this moment the rolling of drums, mingled with the sound of other martial instruments, was heard from the outer courts of the palace.

“ Hark ! the tambour ! ” exclaimed Henri III., “ fresh troops have entered the Louvre.”

“ By your command, Sire ? ” asked the Bourbon, in a tone of displeasure.

“ Our subjects are careful of our safety,” answered Henri III. evasively.

“ They *ought* to be so, Sire,” replied the Bourbon ; “ your Majesty has well earned their love ; and when were the people of France ungrateful ? But against whom are all these precautions taken ? Is the Louvre in a state of siege, or have the burgesses of your good city of Paris broken into revolt ? ”

“ No, my brother, our good city is at

present free from faction or tumult; and it is our intention (with the aid of heaven!) to maintain its tranquillity undisturbed."

" You cannot suppose that I would be the instigator of disorder, Sire," said the Bourbon. " I have drawn the sword to protect the rights of my people, and to uphold their persecuted creed, not to wage war upon your Majesty. On any terms which shall secure to my subjects the immunities, and religious toleration they seek, I will, at once, enter into a compact of truce with your Majesty, and place myself in your hands as a hostage for the due observance of its conditions."

" Sire!" exclaimed Rosni, grasping his sovereign's arm. " Each word you utter is a battle lost."

" Your Majesty will not now suspect me of disloyalty," continued the Bourbon, disregarding the interruption.

" We suspect nothing, my brother—

nothing whatever," said Henri III. hastily.
" But we will sign no truce—enter into no compact, which shall favour, or appear to favour, the dissemination of heresy and sedition. To tolerate such a faith were to approve it. And we would rather command a second Saint-Barthélemi; rather imitate the example of our brother, Philip II. of Spain; or pursue the course pointed out to us by our cousin of Guise and the Messieurs of the League, than in any way countenance a religion so hateful to us. We are too good a Catholic for that, my brother. Our reign has been (for our sins!) disturbed by three great troubles. Our brother of Anjou and his faction; the Balafré and his Leaguers; you and your friends of the Reform."

" Sire!"

" We know not which of the three has been the most vexatious. Anjou with his claims; Guise with his pretensions; or you with your

exactions. We shall be glad to put an end to *one* of these annoyances."

"I have exacted nothing but what was my due, Sire," replied the Bourbon bluntly.

"So saith Anjou; so saith the Guise; so say all rebels."

"Rebels, Sire!"

"Fret not yourself about a word, my brother. Your own conduct will best prevent the application of the term, if you deem it injurious."

"Sire," replied the Bourbon, drawing himself up to his full height, and regarding his royal brother with a glance of undisguised scorn and defiance, "you have done me deep wrong in stigmatizing me as a rebel. It is false, I am none. Rashness, insane rashness,—(if you please), is all that can be laid to my charge. I came hither attended only by the Baron de Rosni, whose person as my ambassador, guarded by your passport is sacred: and, as I came, I should have departed, had not an accident occa-

sioned my discovery. No thought of treason was in my breast. Nor had I other motive save a desire to splinter a lance with one, whose prowess I doubted, with as much justice it appears, as your Majesty now exhibits in questioning my sincerity."

" You mistake us, my brother. Heaven forbid that we should question your fealty."

" Your actions contradict your words, Sire," returned the Bourbon. " It is evident from the threatening demeanour of your attendants, from the hostile disposition of your troops, as well as from the orders you have issued, that you *do* distrust me ; and that you have more reason to apprehend my influence with the populace, in the event of an insurrection, than you care to admit. Your alarm is groundless. Had I come as an enemy, I should not have come alone. I am the contriver of no plot, the leader of no faction ; nor, amid yon vast assemblage could I point out the features of a single adherent, though I nothing fear if my war-cry were once

raised, I should find friends to rally round my standard. Yestermorn, with but a dozen followers, I entered the gates of Paris: to-day, with but *one*, those of the Louvre. And to morrow's dawn shall find me and my scanty train far on our way to my territories, if I have your Majesty's permission, peaceably to depart."

"In the meantime, my brother," said Henri III. "we would gladly learn what induced you to quit those territories to which you are now, apparently, so anxious to return? We can scarcely flatter ourselves that a desire to hold this interview with us was your sole motive."

"So far from it, Sire, that, I repeat, it was my intention to have remained strictly incognito, had not my own heedlessness betrayed me. The object of my hair-brained journey I will no longer disguise. When I deserted the Louvre," added he, his brow relaxing to a slight smile, "there were two things, which, in my haste, I left behind me.—"

“ Ah ! what were they, my brother ?”

“ The mass, and my wife, Sire. For the loss of the former I felt little concern. The want of the latter was a more serious grievance. And, having failed in my previous remonstrance, made through the Sieur Duras, I thought the fault might rest with my envoy. Accordingly, I resolved—”

“ To come yourself,” interrupted Henri III., laughing heartily. “ A wise determination, certes. Still, we fear your suit has proved as unsuccessful as ever, though backed by your own solicitations, my brother.”

“ His Majesty is certain of gaining his cause, now that he has employed the Chevalier Crichton as an advocate,” cried Chicot. “ It is exactly three years since the Sieur Duras came to Paris on this fool’s errand, and then Bussy D’Amboise sent him back again, like Panurge ‘*avec une puce à l’oreille !*’ The same result would have followed his own application had it not been for this master

stroke. Of all men, Henri of Navarre ought to be the last to forget the maxim, that—

*A husband, out of season,
Is a husband without reason !*

“ Let not these taunts annoy you, my brother,” said Henri III. “ You shall have both your lost matters. But we cannot restore the one without the other.”

“ I will have neither, Sire.”

“ You are changeable, my brother.”

“ It may be so, Sire,” replied the Bourbon, coldly. “ But I have the same aversion to a faithless woman, that I have to a consecrated wafer.”

“ We have at all events made you the offer,” said Henri III., angrily. “ And now, Chevalier Crichton,” continued he, addressing the Scot, who had remained near him, a silent, but deeply-interested observer of the scene,—“ advance!—arrest him!”

These words, pronounced in a sharp abrupt tone, produced a startling effect upon the group. Saint Luc and D'Épernon drew their swords, closing in on either side of their Sovereign. The Bourbon uttered a single exclamation and placed his hand upon the hilt of his own weapon. His arm, however, was again forcibly withheld by Rosni.

"Remember, Sire," said the Baron in a deep whisper, "your sacred pledge to your people, and to your God. One false step and your subjects are without a ruler—your church without a defender. Be warned!"

"*Quos Deus vult perdere prius dementat!*" cried Chicot.

Crichton, meanwhile, stirred not — but watched steadily the movements of the King of Navarre.

"Must we repeat our orders, messire?" asked Henri III.

"No Sire," replied the Bourbon. "I will

relieve the Chevalier Crichton from his embarrassment. Here is my sword."

The Scot received it with a profound salutation.

"Keep it," continued the Bourbon; "you need not blush to bear it."

"I blush to receive it, Sire," returned Crichton scarcely able to repress the emotions that swelled within his bosom.

"And now for our other captive and his dog," said Henri III.

"Hold, Sire," exclaimed the Bourbon, "ere this conference is broken up, I have a secret of importance to disclose to you. I would have willingly imparted it to your ears alone. But since you refuse me a private audience I am compelled to proclaim it openly."

At this moment the shifting glances of Henri III. fell upon the Duc de Nevers. The latter was evidently ill at ease, and approaching his sovereign said in a low

emphatic tone, “this interview were better concluded, Sire.”

“We think otherwise, fair cousin,” returned the King, whose curiosity was awakened —“May we venture to trust ourselves alone with him for a few moments?” whispered he. “He is unarmed.”

“By no means, Sire,” returned the Duke, “he hath his poignard.”

“True,” returned Henri III., “and he is not unskilful in its use, as we have seen. His strength, too, greatly exceeds our own—and though his bearing is frank, and loyal, it were not prudent implicitly to confide in him.—Speak! my brother,” continued he, aloud. “We are impatient to hear your disclosure.”

“Your Majesty drives me to the course I now adopt,” returned the Bourbon haughtily, “the shame I would willingly have spared the Queen your Mother, I will no longer spare her.”

“ Will you endure this insolence, Sire ? ” said the Duc de Nevers, alarmed at the King of Navarre’s commencement.

“ Heed him not,” returned Henri III., “ her Majesty will give herself little concern about *his* reproaches.”

“ What I would have requested,” continued the Bourbon, who had paused for a moment, “ I now demand. In the name of my cousin, Henri I. of Bourbon, Prince of Condé, whose person I here represent, I require from your Majesty the liberation of his sister, unjustly detained a captive within the Louvre by the Queen, Catherine de Medicis.”

“ Mort-dieu ! my brother,” exclaimed Henri III., “ you are strangely deceived in this matter. Our Mother has no such captive.”

“ Contest not the point, Sire,” whispered the Duc de Nevers, who was now relieved from his own apprehension. “ *Promise* her liberation.”

“ Your Majesty has been, designedly, kept in ignorance of the circumstance,” said the Bourbon.

“ Well, my brother,” returned Henri III., with affected bonhomie, “ if your representation be correct, we pass our word for the freedom of the Princess.”

As this speech was uttered, a slight exclamation of joy escaped Crichton. But when the King glanced towards him his eyes were riveted upon the Bourbon’s sword.

“ Add to your boon, Sire,” said the King of Navarre; “ for which I thank you as heartily as if my own liberty had been included in it, and suffer the Princess to set forth, at once, from the Louvre, under your safe-conduct. My own escort shall, with your Majesty’s permission, act as her convoy to Henri of Condé.”

“ Why this extreme urgency, my brother?” asked Henri III., doubtfully.

“ Because,” replied the Bourbon, “ while she remains in the power of Catherine

de Medicis—her life—her honour, are in danger.”

“ Beware how you scandalise our mother,” returned Henri III., with warmth. “ These are dark accusations.”

“ They are made in broad daylight before your assembled nobles, Sire, and will not be unremembered.”

“ Nor unrequited,” answered Henri III., frowning. “ Proceed, my brother.”

“ I am a soldier, not a courtier, Sire,” continued the Bourbon. “ My steel corslet is seldom exchanged for silken pourpoint:—my rude speech as seldom takes the garb of flattery. Your Majesty will bear in mind that you have forced me to make this charge in public. I am prepared to answer to the Queen your Mother for my accusation, and to approve it. Your royal word is passed for the liberation of the Princess. That is enough for me.”

“ What are we to think of this mystery?” demanded Henri III., of the Duc de Nevers.

“ That his Majesty of Navarre’s wits, as well as his discretion, have deserted him, my liege,” returned the Duke. “ I am sufficiently in the confidence of Catherine de Medicis to assert, unhesitatingly, that there is no such Princess.”

“ You are sure of it, fair cousin ? ”

“ As of your Majesty’s existence—as of the presence of yon Bernese bear.”

“ You have greatly relieved us. We began to fear that we had, in some way or other, committed ourself.”

The Bourbon, meanwhile, conferred an instant apart with his counsellor.

“ Thou wilt command this escort, Rosni,” whispered he, “ and say to the Prince of Condé that—”

“ I quit not your Majesty’s side for any Prince, or Princess,” interrupted Rosni.

“ How, Sir ? ”

“ Spare your frowns, Sire. I can be as obstinate, on occasion, as your Majesty.”

“ Stay with me, then, my faithful friend,” replied the Bourbon, pressing the hand of his counsellor,” and let our recent difference be forgotten. Thou hast my full pardon.”

“ When your Majesty has obtained your own forgiveness, it will be time enough to extend the same grace to me,” rejoined Rosni, bluntly.

“ Chevalier Crichton,” said the Bourbon, turning in displeasure from his confidant, “ will you escort the Princess of Condé to her brother ? ”

The Scot’s colour mounted to his temples at the proposal.

“ Your Majesty has already appointed me to the post of your chief attendant,” returned he, in a voice of constrained calmness, “ I cannot accept both offices.”

“ Nor can we consent to part with you, mon cher,” said Henri III., approvingly. “ To put an end to this discussion, my brother, “ continued he, addressing the

Bourbon, “ if you will find the Princess, we will undertake to find the convoy.”

“ A la bonne heure !” cried the King of Navarre. “ My task will be readily performed. Behold her !” added he, pointing to the royal gallery.

“ Behold whom !—you cannot mean ?—”

“ In the Queen of the lists—in the fair Esclairmonde your Majesty beholds the sister of Henri of Condé—my cousin—*your* cousin, Sire.”

“ Mort et damnation ! my brother, you dream !—Esclairmonde *our* cousin ! Esclairmonde a Princess of Condé !—Were it so ?—but you do not—cannot expect us to credit your assertion, unsupported by proof, upon a point like this ?”

“ I *have* proofs, Sire,—proofs of her illustrious birth—of her capture as an infant by Tavannes — of her detention within the Louvre by Catherine — proofs which will carry conviction, even to the mind of your Majesty.”

“ Produce them, my brother, produce them !” cried Henri III., trembling with agitation.

“ Let your guard, by sound of trump, summon before your presence Messire Florent Chrétien, a preacher of the Reformed Faith, and the spiritual adviser of the Princess, he is within the Louvre—he is in possession of these proofs.”

“ Ha ! think you to delude us by the devices of the evil one—or of his minister ?” vociferated Henri III. “ Think you we would place the fabrications of this miserable hypocrite against the word of our mother. Think you we will endure the presence of a heretic, and a propagator of heresy knowing him to be such. Let him take heed how he approaches us—how he defiles the hem of our garment—how he pollutes our palace. The Grève hath an axe—the Pré-aux-clercs a stake—Montfaucon a gibbet. He shall have his choice of the three ; the sole grace a false and perjured Huguenot may look for at our hands.”

"Be all three his portion, and mine, if he deceives you, Sire," returned the Bourbon. "Let him be summoned. I will abide the issue."

"Be it so," replied Henri III., as if he had suddenly decided upon the course he ought to pursue.

"Your guard must seek him within the dungeons of the Louvre," said Crichton. "He is a prisoner."

"A prisoner!" echoed the Bourbon, starting.

"A prisoner!" repeated Henri III., joyfully.

"He is in the hands of Catherine de Medicis," continued the Scot.

"And the documents?" demanded the King of Navarre, eagerly.

"Are also in her Majesty's possession," returned Crichton.

"Perdition!" exclaimed the Bourbon.

"Gramercy!" cried Henri III.

"Florent Chrétien is adjudged to the stake," continued Crichton.

“ Will you now forgive yourself, Sire ? ” asked Rosni, in a low tone.

“ Away ! ” ejaculated the King of Navarre, stamping his foot to the ground with wrath. “ Ventre-saint-gris ! is this a season for reproaches ? Your Majesty, I am well assured,” added he, indignantly appealing to his royal brother, “ will see fit to reverse this most unjust judgment ? Chrétien is innocent of all crime.”

“ Of all, save that of heresy, it may be,” returned Henri III., “ than which no guilt is more heinous and unpardonable in our eyes, and of which, even by your own shewing, he is culpable. Our Mother has acted in conformity with our wishes, and in furtherance of the interests of the true faith, in condemning this Huguenot preacher to expiate his offences against Heaven at the stake ; and, were our sanction needful, it should be readily accorded.”

“ *Vive la Messe !* ” cried the courtiers.

“ You hear, my brother,” said Henri III ,

smiling. “Such are the sentiments of every good Catholic.”

“Will you violate the majesty of your own laws, Sire?” demanded the Bourbon. “Have you no regard for the sanctity of the pledges voluntarily given for the security of your Protestant subjects?”

“*Hæreticis fides non servanda est,*” rejoined Henri III., coldly.

“It follows then, Sire,” said the Bourbon, “that your royal word, passed to me for the liberation of the Princess Esclairmonde, is not binding upon your pliant conscience?—ha!”

“Satisfy us that she *is* a Princess, and we will keep our faith with you, albeit you *are* a heretic, my brother. Produce your proofs, and we repeat, she is free.”

“Your Majesty may safely make that promise now,” returned the Bourbon, scornfully.

“If *I* produce those proofs ere midnight, will you fulfil your word, Sire?” asked Crichton, advancing.

Henri III. was visibly embarrassed.

“ You cannot retreat, my liege,” whispered the Duc de Nevers.

“ But, fair cousin,” returned the King, in an under tone, “ we would rather part with our crown than Esclairmonde — and this accursed Scot would outwit the devil.”

“ He will not outwit Catherine de Medicis, Sire,” said the Duke. “ I will put her upon her guard.”

“ How says your Majesty ?” demanded the Bourbon.

“ Our word is already passed,” returned Henri III.

“ Enough !” said Crichton, retiring.

At this moment the Vicomte de Joyeuse approached.

“ I am the bearer of a billet from the Queen-Mother, Sire,” said he, presenting a sealed dispatch to the King.

“ Peste !” exclaimed Henri III., as he glanced over the contents of the letter. “ We have been too precipitate, fair cousin,”

continued he, addressing the Duc de Nevers.
“ Her Majesty counsels us to treat the
Béarnais with all courtesy and considera-
tion.”

The Duke replied by a shrug of the shoulder.

“ Nay, this is not all,” added the King,
“ she entreats us to restore his sword.”

“ And your Majesty will, of course, comply
with her request.”

“ Pardieu ! no—my cousin.”

“ Remember the fair Esclairmonde, Sire.”

“ Ah! you are right, my cousin,” returned Henri III., hastily. “ That name at once decides us. We know not what credit is to be attached to this story of the lovely Demoiselle’s birth. It is possible it may be true. But true or false, it is plain if we would hope to succeed in our designs upon her, we must now, more than ever, yield implicit obedience to our mother’s behests.”

“ Wisely resolved, Sire.”

“ Our passion increases with the difficulties

that oppose it; and we will neglect no means of insuring its gratification."

"The first step towards that point, Sire, is to effect a reconciliation with the Béarnais."

"That will not be difficult," returned Henri III.; "his choler is as readily appeased, as aroused. You shall see how easily we will cajole him. A fair word or so, will make all smooth between us. Approach, my brother," continued he, addressing the King of Navarre in a friendly tone, "we have done you wrong, and are eager to make you reparation."

"Sire!" exclaimed the Bourbon, springing eagerly forward.

"Your hand, my brother."

"It is the hand of a heretic, Sire."

"No matter! it is a loyal hand, and as such we clasp it. Nay, withdraw it not, my brother. We wish all our court to perceive that we are on terms of amity

together—especially our mother,” added he, aside.

“ *Vive le roi!*” cried the courtiers. And the shout was echoed by a thousand voices.

“ We have deprived you of your sword,” continued Henri III. “ You cannot reclaim your gift from the Chevalier Crichton. We pray you, therefore, to wear this blade for our sake,” added he, unbuckling his rapier, the hilt of which was studded with diamonds, and presenting it to the King of Navarre. “ Promise us only that you will not draw it against a subject of France.”

“ I will wear it for your defence, Sire,” replied the Bourbon. “ Your Majesty’s kindness will not allow me for an instant to doubt your sincerity, but I would gladly learn to whom I am indebted for this sudden alteration in your sentiments.”

“ To one whose intercession you scarcely merit,” returned Henri III., with a gracious smile—“ to our mother.

“Jour de dieu!” exclaimed the Bourbon,
“to her!”

“Pardon the unworthy reception we have given you. We were taken by surprise, and could not divest ourself of certain misgivings, which this letter has wholly dispelled. We will make the best amends in our power.”

“Grant me the life of Florent Chrétien, and we are quits, Sire.”

Henri III. was again perplexed.

“His life is in our mother’s hands:” said he, “make your appeal to her. You stand well with her it seems. We never interfere between her Majesty and the objects of her displeasure. Yet stay! if you can induce this Chrétien to abjure his heresies we think we may venture to promise you his life.”

“You have ratified his doom, Sire,” said the Bourbon, retiring. “What think you of this change, Rosni?” added he, as he rejoined his counsellor.

“I like it not,” returned Rosni. “The

friendship of this Vilain Herodes is more to be dreaded than his enmity. But you have confided in him?—”

“ Bon gré, mal gré,” answered the Bourbon.

“ How have we played our part, my ‘cousin?’” asked Henri III., of the Duc de Nevers.

“ To admiration, Sire,” replied the Duke.

“ You are a flatterer. But we are weary of this conference. Bring forward our captive and his dog. ’Twill divert our thoughts to question him.”

“ Take heed, compère,” cried Chicot, “ you will not find that hound so carefully muzzled as the great bear of Berne.”

CHAPTER X.

THE MISSAL.

—Que toute trahison sur le traître retombe !

VICTOR HUGO.—*Hernani*.

BLOUNT, who had been strictly guarded during the conference we have just detailed, and had endured with stoical calmness, all the petty persecution, in the shape of taunts and blows, that his captors chose to inflict, was now dragged into the King's presence. Druid followed as closely at his heels, as the sash by which he was restrained would permit him to do.

“ Before you bestow yon caitiff’s head upon the executioner of the Châtelet, my liege,” said Joyeuse, “ it may be well to interrogate him as to the motive of his daring action. I can scarcely think, with all his reckless courage, that it proceeded from mere bravado. My own opinion is,” added he, lowering his voice, “ that he is charged with a message to the Béarnais—in which case your Majesty may elicit some important information from him.

“ We will essay, mon enfant,” replied Henri III. ; “ but we despair of success. Look at his stubborn visage and resolute bearing—and say if threats are likely to shake him. That man would perish rather than play the traitor.”

And so it proved. Blount refused to return other than a surly monosyllabic response to the monarch’s inquiries.

“ Remove him to the Grand-Châtelet,” said Henri III., impatiently, “ and let the

question ordinary and extraordinary be proposed to him."

"It will extort nothing," rejoined the Englishman, firmly.

"We were right you perceive, mon cher," said the Monarch, turning to his favourite.

"I will find a way to wring his secret from him, my liege," replied the Vicomte. "I see where his vulnerable point lies." And he whispered to the King.

"You have hit it," returned Henri, laughing." But proceed not to extremities."

"Leave him to me, Sire," said Joyeuse. "Draw thy sword," added he, addressing the man-at-arms by whom Druid was guarded; "and upon each interrogation, which this obstinate traitor may decline to answer, hew a limb from his hound."

The weapon of the halberdier flashed in the air.

"Devils!" cried Blount, in a voice that sounded like the roar of a lion, at the same time exerting himself with so much force as

to burst asunder the leathern thong that confined his arms. “ What would you have me do ? ”

“ Reply without disguise, to his Majesty’s interrogations,” said Crichton, advancing towards him.

“ Well, then,” returned Blount, “ to spare my dog unnecessary suffering, I will do that which I would not have done to preserve my own flesh from the hot pincers, or my bones from the grinding wheel—I *will* speak—though, by the rood ! I have nothing to reveal. I might have borne to see Druid perish,” muttered he, “ but to behold him die by piecemeal—no—no—I could not endure *that*.”

“ What brought thee hither, thou contumacious varlet ? ” demanded Henri III. “ Wert thou not aware that thy life would be the penalty of thy rashness ? ”

“ I was fully aware of the consequences of the step I took,” answered the Englishman. “ But the desire to serve a friend

was paramount to any consideration of danger."

"What friend, sirrah?"

"I have been too bold, perhaps, to term him such," returned Blount; "but death levels all distinctions, and mine is so near at hand, that I may claim some exemption from worldly forms. My fidelity will, I nothing doubt, insure me a worthy place in his remembrance."

"Thy devotion to whom, sirrah?" demanded Henri III., impatiently. "To the King of Navarre?"

"To the Chevalier Crichton, Sire."

"To Crichton!" echoed Henri, in astonishment. "Morbleu! Joyeuse," continued he, addressing the Vicomte, "this Scot exercises an unaccountable influence over his fellows. Here is a sturdy knave, whose whole heart seems to be with his hound, and who derides the dungeon and the rack, ready to lay down his head for the love he bears him. By what magic is this accomplished?"

“ By the magic of manner, Sire,” returned Joyeuse ; “ was ever smile beheld so captivating—was ever demeanour witnessed at once so courteous and so dignified, as that of Crichton ! Add to the charm of manner, the ennobling, and heroic spirit of chivalry breathing from his lightest word and action— weaving its spell around him, and inspiring all who approach with kindred ardour, and you have the secret of his witchery over the minds of men. It was the same with Bayard —the same with Du-Guesclin—with Charlemagne, and with Godefroy de Bouillon. Some men there are for whom we would willingly live : others for whom we would, as readily, die. Crichton is among the latter.”

“ You have merely drawn the distinction between friendship and devotion, mon cher,” replied Henri, turning, with a look of displeasure, towards Blount. “ Thy intelligence must have been of vital import, sirrah,” added he, pursuing his inquiries, “ since it could not be delayed till the jousts were ended.”

“ My errand was nothing more, answered Blount, carelessly, “ than to apprise the Chevalier Crichton that a packet on which he set some store, and which after incurring various risks, had been strangely found, was again as strangely lost.”

“ Is this all thou know’st concerning it mon maître ?”

“ I know that it has proved a fatal charge, Sire. All who have meddled with it have come to ill. It was lost, as it was won, at the point of the sword. To the breast of him, who first grasped it, it brought a poignard ; to the next who received it, the stake ; and to myself, it hath brought the axe. May like calamity alight on her into whose possession it hath now fallen.”

“ Your Majesty will, perhaps, next question him as to his acquaintance with the contents of the packet ?” interposed Crichton.

“ By no means,” returned Henri, frowning. “ We perceive your drift, and have heard

enough to convince us that the testimony of this traitor is suborned. Hola! Larchant," continued he, addressing one of the officers in attendance, " let the prisoner be conveyed to the Châtelet, and thrown into the *Fin d'aise*, where, if he expire not within the week, the headsman may release him from further torture."

" Your's are tender mercies, Sire," returned Blount, smiling disdainfully.

" Let the hound be cared for," continued Henri.

" Is he not to go with me ?" asked Blount, starting.

" Hence with the prating knave!" exclaimed the King, furiously.

Blount suddenly broke from his guards, and prostrated himself at the King's feet.

" I do not ask for mercy, Sire," cried he. " I know my life is forfeited, and justly ; but oh ! separate me not from my faithful companion."

Henri wavered. If he *had* a heart it lay

on the side on which the Englishman now assailed him.

“ Thou lov’st thy dog ? ” said he, musingly.

“ Better than my life.”

“ ’Tis a good sign!—Thou *shoulds’t* be honest. We cannot, however, grant thy request. Refusal here is mercy. The poor animal could only howl beneath thy carcase ; and it may console thee to learn, that in changing masters, he will find one, who will not value him less than thou dost, while he is better able to protect him. Stand back ! mon-maître.”

“ My dog is no courtier,” replied Blount, rising ; “ he will serve no second master. What ho ! Druid.”

This summons, followed by a short, sharp whistle, brought Druid instantly to the Englishman’s feet. The scarf was round his throat ; and in his teeth he held a large fragment of the apparel of the man-at-arms, which he had torn off in effecting his liberation.

"I knew no bonds would hold thee, brave fellow," said Blount, caressing his dog, who, in his turn, fondly licked his master's hand.
"We must part, old comrade."

Druid looked wistfully in his face.

"For ever," said Blount, slowly, "for ever!"

"Away with him," cried Henri, "but take heed you harm not the hound. We would not lose that noble animal for a Prince's ransom."

"A moment, Sire, and he is your's," ejaculated Blount, over whose open and manly countenance a sullen cloud had now spread. "It is hard to part with a friend whom one has long cherished. This dog," continued he, with difficulty mastering the emotion, which was proclaimed by sundry twitches at the corners of his mouth, "will feed from no hand but mine; will answer to no call but mine; will fight at no bidding but mine. I must teach him obedience to his new master. You will find him tractable enough when I have done with him."

"I will take every care of him," said Henri, rather affected by the scene.

"Fare thee well, Druid!" murmured Blount, "and now," added he gently, "lie down, lie down, old friend."

Druid crouched upon the ground.

Swift as thought Blount placed his foot upon the dog's body, as if he was about to crush him to the earth, and with both hands seized the scarf entwined around his throat. Though he perceived the action, and might have guessed its intent, Druid offered no resistance. His eyes were fixed upon his master. The noose was tightened, and in another instant the fate of the brave hound would have been sealed, but for the intervention of Crichton, who forcibly arrested the Englishman's arm.

"Desist!" whispered he. "I promise to dispatch him, if aught befal thee."

"You promise more than you can perform sometimes, Chevalier Crichton," returned Blount, sullenly. "You undertook to free

me from any peril I might incur in the execution of your orders. My head is now within reach of the axe."

"Thy own madness has brought it there," rejoined Crichton sternly. "Release thy dog, or I abandon thee to thy fate."

Blount, with some reluctance, relinquished his hold of the scarf.

"Where is the missal, which I entrusted to thy care?" continued the Scot.

"Where you placed it—next my heart; where it will remain, while that heart beats."

"Saint-Andrew be praised!" exclaimed Crichton joyfully. "Anticipating they would search thee, and discover that book upon thy person, I allowed matters to proceed thus far. But no injury should have been done thee. Deliver it instantly to the king."

Crichton retired, and Blount drew a small richly-gilded volume from his doublet.

"Sire!" said he, addressing Henri III., "this book, confided to me by the Chevalier Crichton, dropped from the folds of the

packet, about which you have just questioned me. It was committed to my charge because, upon ascertaining it was a mass-book of the Romish Church, Messire Florent Chrétien refused to receive it. I am a Catholic. And were I not, I have no such scruples. It would seem to belong to your Majesty. The vellum cover is emblazoned with a royal crown—with the lilies of France, and with the letters *C* and *H*."

"Pardieu! it is our mother's missal," exclaimed Henri III., "it is her cipher linked with that of the King our father. Give us the book Du Halde."

"Your Majesty will not touch it," said the Duc de Nevers, turning pale, "it may be poisoned."

"I will be the first to open it, if you have any such apprehensions, my liege," interposed Crichton.

"We have no fears," replied the King. "From these pages we derive health and succour, not bane. Ah! mon Dieu!" ex-

claimed he, as his eye rested upon a leaf on which certain mysterious characters were traced. “Have we chanced upon the serpents’ nest?”

“What have you discovered my liege?” asked Joyeuse.

“A plot!” vociferated Henri III., “a conspiracy against our crown—against our life!”

Universal consternation prevailed amidst the assemblage. Many mysterious and suspicious glances were interchanged by the nobles; and a look of intelligence passed, unobserved, between Crichton and the King of Navarre.

“By whom is this plot contrived my liege?” asked the Duc de Nevers with quivering lips.

“By whom think you, monsieur le Duc?—by whom think you?” thundered the King.

“By the Guise?”

“By our father’s son—by the Duc D’Anjou.”

There was a deep silence, which no one cared to break, except the Bourbon, who coughed slightly in an ineffectual attempt to conceal his satisfaction.

“We have long suspected our brother’s treachery,” said Henri, after a pause during which he appeared greatly disturbed. “But we have here evidence of his guilt, under his own hand.”

“Is it a letter you have found, Sire?” inquired the Duc de Nevers, anxiously.

“Ay, my cousin,” returned the King, in a deep whisper, “it *is* a letter!—a letter from Anjou to our mother—a letter of treason and blood penned upon these sacred pages—a letter devised by the Demon, inscribed upon the word of God!”

“It is a forgery, my liege. The Duc D’Anjou is incapable of a crime so monstrous and unnatural. I will answer for his innocence with my head.”

“Answer for yourself, monseigneur,” replied Henri in a freezing tone, at the same time

speaking in a voice so low, as to be inaudible to his attendants, “ you will find it no easy matter. The characters in which this letter is traced reveal the writer. They are secret characters, known only to ourself—our mother—and this arch-traitor. They were contrived for the security of our own despatches from Poland :—when Charles stood towards us, as we now stand to Anjou ; and when our mother betrayed him, as she has here betrayed us. These characters cannot have been fabricated —neither can they be deci-phered without a key. Look at this writing! To you it is incomprehensible as an Egyptian hieroglyphic : to us legible as the billet of a mistress. And see ! a leaf is want-ing. There was our mother’s letter—here is Anjou’s answer. Jesus-Maria ! if we had any doubts left, this would remove them. We are doubly betrayed.”

“ My gracious liege—”

“ Anjou is guilty of lèze-majesté and felony in the highest degree — and shall die the

death of a traitor—as shall all who have favoured, or are engaged in this foul conspiracy—even though we flood the Louvre in the noblest blood of France. The scaffold and the block shall not be removed from these courts -- nor shall the headsman cease his labour till he has utterly exterminated this hydra-headed monster of rebellion. Hitherto we have been easy, forgiving, merciful. It has availed nothing. Henceforth we will be relentless and inflexible. The ordinance of our ancestor Louis XI. which condemns him who is guilty of misprision of treason, to like doom with the traitor, is not yet abrogated. You have answered for Anjou with your head. Take heed we claim not the pledge. It is already forfeited.”

“ Your suspicions cannot attach to me, Sire,” faltered De Nevers. “ I have been your loyal follower ever.”

“ Our suspicions!” echoed the King in a tone of irony. “ Par la Mortdieu ! mon-

seigneur, we *suspect* you not—we are *assured* of your treachery."

" Malédiction ! this to me, Sire."

" Be patient, fair cousin. Another such intemperate exclamation, and our guard shall conduct you to the Bastille."

" Your menaces alarm me not, Sire," replied the Duke, who had now recovered his composure, " conscious as I am of my innocence, and of the groundlessness of the charge you have preferred against me. The name of Gonzaga has never yet been coupled with that of traitor. Were I aware of any conspiracy against your Majesty, I would denounce it, though my own son were its leader. And if I should march from hence to the scaffold with which you have threatened me, my last prayer should be for the uninterrupted prosperity, and long continuance of your reign."

" Judas !" muttered the King, between his teeth, " the plot is better organized, and

nearer its outbreak than I deemed it, if he is thus confident. I must proceed with greater caution. *Qui nescit dissimulare, nescit regnare.* Vive-dieu ! my cousin," continued he, placing his hand familiarly upon the Duke's saddle-bow, and regarding him with a look, in which distrust was skilfully veiled by an expression of friendliness, " your warmth would almost persuade me I have wronged you in suspecting you of defection from my side. If it be so, you will know how to overlook the error. Environed as I am by faction and sedition,—surrounded by perfidy in all its shapes and all its aspects,—by rebels in the mask of brothers,—traitors under the cloak of counsellors,—assassins in the guise of friends;—when those I have most loved, most honoured, most rewarded, are the first to desert — to betray me;—when those, bound to me by the strict ties of duty, and by the stricter ties of affinity, forget alike their allegiance and affection;—when the hand that once caressed me brings

the poignard to my bosom ; and the lips, from which the fondest maternal endearments have flowed, command our destruction, I may be forgiven if I should mistake a loyal follower for a deadly enemy, and for a moment question the stainless honour, and mistaken, though not wholly unrequited, fidelity of a Gonzaga."

" My services, however requited," replied the Duke, with some asperity, " should have secured me from these unmerited taunts. But since they, who should be nearest to your highness in your love, are visited with the extremity of your indignation, I am content to disregard the affront."

" You do wisely, monseigneur," rejoined the King, with a smile of derision. " *I* need not remind you this is not the first time I have detected and defeated Anjou's treasonable schemes. I need not tell you of the revolt, which was to have followed my return from Poland to the throne of France ; of the ambuscade which beset

my route ; of the assassins who were balked of their victim. I need not tell you of my brother's capture, interrogation, and confession ; of the decapitation of La Mole and Coconnas ; and of my mistaken clemency. Catherine de Medicis in those days watched over my safety with zealous care. Now she has instigated a rebellion she was then prompt to crush. Would to heaven Anjou had yielded to the promptings of his own dark heart, and strangled her as she embraced him in his prison at Vincennes ! ”

“ Sire, your resentment carries you too far. Catherine de Medicis is still your mother. To her you owe your crown.”

“ Oui-dà, monseigneur, and to *her* also I might owe my abdication and dethronement, if she would permit me to finish my term of life in the seclusion of a cloister. Think you I know not *whose* hand has hitherto grasped the reins of empire ; whose voice has swayed my councils ; whose mandates have controlled my edicts ;—

whose policy has influenced my actions? Think you I deemed, when Catherine resigned the regency of this realm to me, she resigned also its sovereign sway? Pardieu! if such has been your opinion, it is time you were undeceived. I owe her much, but she owes me more. I am indebted to her for the name of king; she has to thank me for the powers of royalty. If I have preferred an existence of enjoyment and repose (as much repose, at least, as is ever allotted to princes) to the cares and responsibilities of active government; if I have sought to dispel my ennui by a thousand trifling occupations; if the pursuits of pleasure, the exercises of devotion, the companionship of favourites and of mistresses have engrossed too much of my attention,—though my people may have some reason to complain, our mother has none—because such a course has been consonant to her inclinations. I have submitted all to her disposal. But, if

I am rudely awakened from my dream of security; if I find that the arm which defended me has become hostile; that what I have quietly yielded is to be forcibly wrested from me; that not even the semblance of rule is to be left; what wonder if I start, like one from a trance, and, banishing from my breast all feelings, save those akin to justice and retribution, prepare to wreak my vengeance upon the heads of the aggressors."

"Calm yourself, my liege."

"Tête-et-sang! I *am* calm enough, as you will find anon, monseigneur. I pardoned my brother's first transgression—restored him to my love—bestowed upon him in appanage the dukedoms of Berri and Anjou—the earldoms of Touraine and Maine, and refused only his solicitation for the lieutenant-generalship of the kingdom. I had good reasons for my refusal. I reserved that high post for some adherent,

trustworthy and meritorious as the *Duc de Nevers.*"

"Sire," replied the Duke, in confusion, unable to divine Henri's real meaning, and fearful of some snare being laid for him, "I have already received too many proofs of your favour."

"Bah!" exclaimed the King, with ill-disguised irony, "I never till now sufficiently appreciated your services, or fidelity, my cousin. True, I thought in raising you to your present elevated position—in intrusting my Piedmontese army to your command—in appointing you to the government of Pignerol, Savillan and La Perose; in placing certain wealthy benefices at your disposal, in granting you a heavy pension from the coffers of the state—and investing you with the cordon of the Saint-Esprit, which hangs from your gorget; in doing all this I imagined I had made some slight return for your unremitting zeal and

devotedness. But I perceive my mistake. I have yet a greater service to exact: — I have yet a higher reward to offer."

" The service I can conjecture—" said the Duke, after a pause —" the reward ? "

" The post I refused to Anjou. My refusal made him a traitor. My grant should make you loyal."

" Sire ! "

" Your brevet shall be signed to-morrow."

" I should prefer it to-day," replied the Duke, significantly. " To-morrow it may be out of your Majesty's power."

" Ha !" exclaimed Henri, with a thrill of apprehension, " Is my peril then so imminent ? Mary Mother protect me ! "

" In the Virgin's name," whispered the Duke, " I beseech you to maintain your composure. You are surrounded by the spies of Catherine de Medicis, whose glances are fixed upon your every look and gesture; whose ears are on the alert to catch each word you let fall. Still appear to suspect me, or I shall become as much the object of their vigilance

as your Majesty. You are on the brink of a precipice. My arm alone can arrest your fall."

" How shall I evince my gratitude?" said Henri, vainly endeavouring to repress his agitation.

" By the fulfilment of your promise, Sire."

" Doubt it not—doubt it not—my cousin. You shall have your appointment on my return to the Louvre. I swear it, by Saint Louis, my patron! And now relieve my anxiety. You have put me on the rack—"

" Your Majesty must excuse my saying more at present," returned the Duke, evasively, " I have already said too much. Your cabinet will be the fittest place for my further disclosures. Here I dare not breathe them. Meantime, do not disquiet yourself. I will answer for your safety."

Henri darted an angry and distrustful glance at the wily De Nevers.

" Who will answer for your honesty, monsieur le Duc?" said he.

"San-Francesco, *my* patron," replied the Duke, smiling.

"Where is the Prince Vincenzo?" demanded Henri.

"He has been removed by his attendants to the Hotel de Nevers," answered the Duke. "Heaven be praised his wound is not dangerous."

"'Tis well!" exclaimed Henri. "And now take heed, my cousin. To-morrow you are chief in command of our armies, or," added he, in a deep, determined tone, "the Duke of Mantua will have to lament his son and brother."

"As you please, my liege," rejoined De Nevers, with affected indifference, "I have warned you, and you will find my warning fearfully verified, if you neglect it. Arouse the suspicions of Catherine de Medicis, and all is lost. Her party is stronger than your own. Her Majesty, I perceive," continued he, carelessly looking in that direction, "has quitted the grand gallery. She has

remarked our conference, and dispatched a secret messenger to ascertain its object. It must be brought to a close. Pardon my freedom, Sire. Danger is not ceremonious."

" So we find," said Henri.

" Be ruled by me, my liege," continued the Duke, " and your crown shall be preserved without risk—without bloodshed. I will meet plot with counterplot; stratagem with stratagem; and turn the weapons of your adversaries against themselves. One life only shall be sacrificed."

" The life of our brother," faltered Henri.

" No, Sire, that of your rival in the affections of the fair Esclairmonde, that of the Chevalier Crichton."

" Sang-dieu ! though I shall not regret to be freed from a rival so formidable as Crichton, I see not how his destruction will ensure the success of your schemes."

" On him rests the chief reliance of Catherine de Medicis—of the Duc D'Anjou.

On him devolves the terrible part of your assassination."

"Jesus!" exclaimed Henri, smelling at a flacon, which he took from his escarcelle.

"He must die."

"In heaven's name let him die, my cousin. Order his instant execution, if you think proper."

"In good time, my liege. And now let me counsel your Majesty to command some of your youthful nobles and gentlemen to enter the lists, or to engage in such knightly exercises as may induce your lynx-eyed mother and her mouchards to conclude our tête-à-tête has had reference only to the business of the tilt-yard."

"Well thought of, my cousin," replied Henri. "But can you not devise some better expedient than the withdrawal of our loyal attendants from our side at a critical conjuncture like the present? I dare not—will not hazard it."

"What say you to a combat of animals,

Sire?" insinuated De Nevers. " Many months have elapsed since the gentle dames of your court had an opportunity of witnessing a spectacle so delightful. It will afford them the highest gratification, and answer our purpose admirably. Suppose you make trial of the strength and ferocity of the African lion, sent by Philip II. of Spain, against the tigers lately presented to your Majesty by the Grand Signor Amurath III., or, if you think that match unequal, against the pack of German wolves—"

" Or Italian foxes," interrupted Henri. " No, De Nevers, were the lion worsted I should hold it an evil omen. I have often heard of the extreme hardihood of an English bull-dog in the fight, I will now put it to the test."

" Bravo!" exclaimed the Duke.

" I have a wild Spanish bull, black as Pluto, and fierce as Chiron," continued the King, " he shall sustain the hound's attack. Bid his keepers bring him forth,

and chain him to the stoutest post they can find in the lists. Mortdieu! 'twill be brave sport," added he, rubbing his hands with pleasurable anticipation.

De Nevers bowed and retired.

Henri gazed after him a moment in silence, and then addressing his chief valet said quickly, "follow him Du Halde, and let me know with whom he converses. Take note of all he does. Away!—strange!" muttered he, "every thing, whether of love or peril, in which we are concerned, seems to hinge upon Crichton."

"Not at all, compère," said Chicot, who had overheard the latter part of the Monarch's self-communion, "he is your Destiny."

"How, gossip?"

"In his hand rest your crown—your life—your mistress."

"Sirrah!"

"Henriot," said the Jester with a look that ill became his wonted laughter-moving

visage, “ for the first time in my life I am serious.”

“ And the last, I hope, gossip,” returned the King.

“ No, compère, I shall be more serious when I am buffoon to François III. By my bauble! I had rather they should carve me a monument like that of Thevenin de Saint-Ligier, the faithful fool of Charles V., at Senlis, than what I fear should happen. And it *will* happen, unless you profit by my caution.”

“ And what *is* thy caution, my poor gossip?”

“ Place your faith in Crichton, cher Henriot,” whimpered the Jester. “ Otherwise,” sobbed he, “ I shall certainly lose one of the best of masters, and France, will, as certainly, gain one of the worst of kings.”

Struck by the Jester’s unfeigned, though ludicrous emotion Henri seemed to reflect for a short time. He then motioned the Scot to approach him.

“Chevalier Crichton,” said he, “to your charge I intrust this missal. I may require you to produce it hereafter. But understand me, and you too, messeigneurs,” added he, looking round “the suspicions entertained of treasonable intentions on the part of my brother have been entirely dispelled by the Duc de Nevers. I recal my accusation, and beg you to dismiss it from your remembrance.

A murmur of astonishment and displeasure was heard among the courtiers.

“Have I your Majesty’s permission to defy the Duc de Nevers to the combat,” said Crichton, unable to repress his indignation, “and to extort from his own lips an avowal of his treason ?”

“It is needless, mon cher. He has cleared himself from all imputation of guilt.”

“You are the dupe of this wily Italian, my liege,” returned the Scot with warmth, “he is a felon knight and disloyal gentleman.”

“The Duke is absent, messire,” said Henri, anxious to put an end to the discussion.

“On his return I will hurl the epithets in his teeth.”

“Be that task mine,” cried Joyeuse. “You have won honour enough. My sword is eager to leave the scabbard.”

“I have a vow to defend his Majesty against all traitors,” exclaimed Saint-Luc, “and claim the right of challenge.”

“His be the right, who first shall affront the caitiff,” shouted D’Épernon, striking spurs into his charger.

“Agreed!” cried Joyeuse, following the Baron’s example. “We shall see who will be first in the race.”

“Hold! messeigneurs,” ejaculated Henri authoritatively. “Let no one stir from hence on pain of our sovereign displeasure.”

“Vive-dieu!” exclaimed Joyeuse chafing with vexation. “Your Majesty shews more

favour to traitors than to your loyal followers."

"Be patient, mon enfant," returned Henri smiling graciously. "Your devotion and that of our other faithful friends shall not be forgotten. Meantime, we forbid all further allusion to this matter. After the banquet we shall hold a secret council at which thou, Saint-Luc, D'Épernon, Crichton, and, we trust, our brother of Navarre will assist. Till then, keep guard upon your speech and actions. Chevalier Crichton, a word with you."

"By my patron the Evangelist," said Saint-Luc shrugging his shoulders, "I am completely in the dark."

"And I," rejoined D'Épernon. "Henri seems bewitched. Like a love-sick damsel he will—and he will not. He evidently distrusts De Nevers, and yet will not avow his suspicions."

"He has good reasons, doubtless, for his caution," observed Joyeuse. "I will be

sworn this false Duke has betrayed his own party, and purchased Henri's favour with the heads of his colleagues. I am, moreover, of opinion that in lieu of a peaceful mêlée by torchlight, we shall have a sanguinary conflict with swords and sharpened lances. So much the better! Perish the Medicis and her train of Italian impostors, priests, poisoners, and panders! If we can free Henri's neck from this intolerable yoke he will indeed become a King."

"And thou?" interrupted D'Épernon laughing.

"A Duke, peradventure," returned Joyeuse. "En attendant, we are to have a duel between two raffinés in the art of offence. The horns of the bull will, I trust, avenge the injuries inflicted by the teeth of that accursed hound on my gallant charger Bavieca."

"The hound will be the victor, for a thousand pistoles," cried Saint-Luc.

"I am for you," replied Joyeuse, eagerly.

“ Let us look at him,” said D’Épernon, “ methought he was sorely wounded by your men-at-arms.”

“ That will not prevent his fighting,” said Saint-Luc. “ These dogs are the bravest in the world, and will fight as long as life endures.”

Upon which the three nobles directed their coursers towards the Englishman, at whose feet Druid still crouched.

“ What think you of all this, Rosni ? ” said the King of Navarre to his counsellor.

“ That mischief is brewing, Sire,” replied the Baron, knitting his brows; “ and that the Valois is either a knave, or a fool—perhaps both.”

“ It is easy to see that a storm is gathering,” rejoined the Bourbon. “ But it will pass harmlessly over our heads; and may, perhaps, facilitate our evasion.”

“ It may so,” returned Rosni. gravely.

Henri III. meantime, conferred apart with Crichton.

“Guard that missal,” said he, continuing his instructions, “as you would the hidden letters of her you love ; as you would a tress of her hair, or a glove from her hand ; as you would guard holy relic or charmed amulet. We may require it anon.”

“I *will* guard it, as I would the honour of her I love, Sire,” returned Crichton, haughtily. “It shall be wrested from me only with life.”

“When the bull-fight is ended,” said Henri, “depart secretly from the Louvre, and proceed to the Hotel de Nevers. Here is our signet. Display it to any of the captains of the guard and such men-at-arms as you may require will attend you. Arrest the Prince Vincenzo—”

“Sire !”

“Interrupt me not. Arrest him, I say, and let him be conveyed in a litter to the palace. I will give orders for his further custody. This done, rejoin us at the banquet.”

“ Sire,” rejoined Crichton, regarding the King with a searching glance, “ whatever commands you may impose upon me, I will obey. I would, however, counsel you to adopt measures widely different. I am at no loss to discover your design. It is unworthy of the grandson of François I.,—of the son of Henri II. Unmask these traitors, and let them perish by the death they merit. Sever the web they have woven around you with the sword. But not resort to this perfidious Machiavelian policy—treachery against treachery, in which the winner is the loser—or you will find, when too late, that you are not so profoundly versed in its mysteries—or so intimately acquainted with its thousand shifts and expedients as the subtle queen, with whom you have to contend.”

“ We shall see,” replied Henri angrily. “ What I now require is obedience, not counsel.”

“ *Quicquid delirant reges,*” cried Chicot, who had stolen upon them unawares, “ I

am now more than ever convinced of the wisdom of the sage who wrote that kings are fools, and fools are kings. Mark the intimate relationship between us.

Kings are fools, and fools are kings,
Majesty does foolish things,
While from Folly wisdom springs.
Majesty her sceptre swings,
Folly soon her bauble brings ;
Majesty to tinsel clings,
Folly bells of silver rings.
Crowns and coxcombs, fools and kings
Are inseparable things :
Where Kings govern Folly rules,
Fools are Kings, and Kings are fools ! ”

At this moment a loud bellowing roar, followed by general plaudits, announced the appearance of a new combatant within the precincts of the tilt-yard.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BULL.

J'ay ouy conter que feu son père luy faisoit mesler en tous ses mangers et boires de la poudre d'or, d'acier, et de fer, pour le bien fortifier ; ce qu'il continua si-bien jusqu'à l'age de douze ans, qu'il le rendit ainsi fort et robuste jusqu'à prendre un taureau par les cornes, et l'arrester en sa furie.

BRANTÔME. *Hommes Illustres*: Disc. LXXXII.

A MÉNAGERIE, in the olden time, was considered an indispensable appendage to regal state. Sauval informs us, that from the reign of Charles V. to that of Louis XII., there existed in the rue Froidmantel, immediately behind the Louvre, a building “*où soulaient estre les lions du roi.*” When the ancient palace of the Kings of France was in part destroyed

to make way for the magnificent structure, erected upon its site by Pierre Lescot, and now known as the old Louvre, this *variatorium*, removed to one of the outer courts, was greatly increased by François I., and carefully maintained by his successors. Here, on grand occasions, conflicts took place between the savage occupants of the various cages ; and the atrocities of a Roman amphitheatre were, in some degree, revived. Here, the inhuman Charles IX., in whose bosom the soul of Nero would seem to have been lodged, frequently repaired with his favourites to indulge his insatiable appetite for carnage. Here, brilliant crowds assembled ; and the courage and devotion of a lover were sometimes severely attested by his mistress, who, dropping her glove into the scene of strife, made its restoration the price of her future favours.

An exploit of this description, attended with more than ordinary peril, marked the commencement of Crichton's amour

with Marguerite de Valois. A combat of animals had been commanded. Scaffoldings, reared around the court, were graced with the flower and loveliness of the land. A fiercely-contested fight, between the ruler of the forest and the sole disputant of his sway—the striped tiger, had terminated in the defeat of the latter. With mane erect, and paw heavily imposed upon the lacerated breast of his antagonist, the kingly brute, still growling with rage, glared defiance at the assemblage; when, amid the hush of silent admiration that succeeded his victory, was heard the light musical laugh of the Queen of Navarre, and the next moment her embroidered kerchief fell at the feet of the slaughtered tiger. The curiosity of spectators to ascertain whose faith was to undergo this dread ordeal was not long ungratified. Exclamations of terror burst from many a gentle lip as the figure of a youthful (and then unknown) cavalier was discovered within the arena. To the terrible

encounter in which he was about to engage, this youth brought only a poignard, and a short Spanish mantle swathed around his left arm. His finely-formed limbs had no other defence than was afforded by a rich attire of velvet and saye; while his fair uncovered locks, floating over his shoulders, added to the noble and poetical beauty of his countenance. He looked like Ogier le Danois before the lion-guarded gates of Avalon. With a swift and resolute step he advanced towards his foe, who awaited his approach with grim, but majestic composure. He had attained the object of his quest; his foot was placed on the kerchief; his eyes were fixed steadfastly upon the kindling orbs of the lion. At this juncture—and when scarcely a breath was drawn by the spectators, a page at the back of the scaffold was seized with sudden faintness, and uttered a piercing cry. So absorbing, however, was the interest of the passing scene, that no one heeded him, and he fell back deprived of

sense. Better had it been for that page he had never revived ! Roused by the cry, the lion menaced his fatal spring. With a roar that shook the rafters of the gallery, he prepared to dart upon his intrepid enemy. But the cavalier evaded the attack. As the furious beast bounded against him, he sprang to one side, and with marvellous force and skill, plunged his dagger deeply into the animal's throat. The wound was not mortal. Lashing his sides with rage, the lion returned instantly to the charge. On this occasion the cavalier flung himself on the ground ; and, as the animal passed over his prostrate body, inflicted another and surer stroke. The roseate hue, which, during the combat, had deserted the blooming cheek of Marguerite de Valois returned with added lustre, as the cavalier, on bended knee, shortly afterwards sued for the prize he had so dearly won. Marguerite smiled upon him, as she granted his request, as only queens (and queens who love) can

smile ; and that smile was *then* in his esteem held cheaply purchased by the hazard he had run.

On the same night the page, we have described as overcome by emotion, beheld another conflict between the cavalier and the most celebrated duellist of his day, *le bien raffiné* Bussy D'Amboise,—at that time the avowed favourite of the Queen of Navarre. In this second encounter he was fortunate as the first. He disarmed and slightly wounded his adversary. Quitting this rendezvous, which took place in a retired walk within the gardens of the Louvre, the cavalier entered the palace, still warily followed by the page. He was admitted, with some mystery, to the apartments of Marguerite de Valois. Framing a thousand excuses, the page awaited his return within a corridor. It was a night of lengthened torture, for the gallant appeared not till dawn, when, with a quick and buoyant step he passed the miserable witness of his *bonne fortune*.

“ Why follow you not your master, the Seigneur Crichton, good youth ?” said Aubiac (Marguerite’s confidential valet) to the page, who remained like one stupified. “ The coast is clear—away !”

“ Call him not my master,” replied the page, bursting into an agony of tears, and tearing his raven curls, “ I serve him not—I love him not—I will forget him. As to that royal harlot,” continued he, glancing with fury at the door, “ may my curse fall upon her ; may she endure the anguish I have endured ; may she pass one such night as I have passed.” And with these words, he rushed from the corridor.

“ Ha ! ha ! ” laughed Aubiac, “ I see how it is,—a girl in disguise—over head and ears in love with this handsome Scot, whom all the women rave about, though for my part I see nothing extraordinary in him. However, as Madame Marguerite admires him, I suppose he *has* merits I cannot discover. From henceforth the Sieur Bussy is dismissed ; and

for three weeks, or, it may be, three days, the Sieur Crichton will reign in his stead. Maugrebleu! I must take care that pretty vixen does not find her way here again. Of all plagues a jealous woman is the most intolerable; and of all women, your woman of intrigue is the most jealous. Madame Marguerite is the most jealous woman I have the honour to know. The malediction of that unhappy damsel is likely enough to attach to her. Where have I seen that lovely face before? Those dark eyes are certainly not unknown to me. She looks like an Italian: Ah! I have it,—I recollect her. She is the principal actress of the Hotel de Bourbon. A fine girl i'faith. This Crichton is fortunate. I should prefer her to the queen." Aubiac was right in his conjecture. It *was* the Gelosa.

To return. Within the ménagerie, we have just described, the Duc de Nevers sought out the warlike beast destined to sustain the attack of Druid., Captured amid the

Sierra Morena, this wild mountain bull—one of the fiercest of his untameable race—was so little subdued in spirit by confinement, that it required considerable address to approach him ; and it was only by entirely excluding light from his den, that his keepers were enabled to bind, and blindfold him. In this state—now rushing madly forward, now suddenly halting, with lip curled upwards, nostrils distended, head bent down, and tail erect—foaming, butting, bellowing, and leaping—girt, as to his neck and shoulders, with a strong tether of ropes, so disposed, that he could neither break loose from his bondage, nor injure himself by its pressure ; the furious animal, exasperated by the shouts of the spectators, reached the middle of the arena ; where he was speedily attached to the central and stoutest stake in the lists. This done the covering was withdrawn from his eyes.

Dazzled by the sudden transition from obscurity to sunshine, the bull appeared for a

moment bewildered. He then uttered a sullen, ominous moan, which, in the opinion of the experienced, gave unquestionable assurance of his resolution and ferocity. His vigour could not be doubted. In make he was perfect. Broad-chested, wide-fronted, straight-backed, thick-necked, well-hammed,—curled, shaggy, tufted; his tremendous energies were plainly written in every limb. In colour, from the points of his short, sharp, wrinkled horns to his pawing hoofs, he was black as the steeds of Pluto. The old Syracusans would have chosen him as an acceptable sacrifice to that deity. Glaring around the assemblage with eyes of flame, tossing the sand over his shoulders, and lashing his sides with his tail, he all at once changed his moan into a fierce prolonged roar of defiance. This challenge was instantly answered by a growl deep and terrible as his own.

Before, however, we attempt to describe

the combat, we will repair, for a few moments, to the outer ranks of the spectators, composed, as the reader is aware, of the burgesses, the scholars, and others of the commonalty of Paris.

“ Valeme Dios !” exclaimed a swarthy-visaged knave, with a broad-leaved, rusty sombrero pulled over his beetle brows, pressing forward as he spoke to obtain a nearer view of the bull, “ a noble animal, and of a good heart I’ll be sworn. He is of the right breed and make. I know his stock well. He comes from the mountains of Estremadura ; from the heights of the Guadalcana, where range herds of the finest steers in Spain — ciertamente ! I have seen a hundred such when a grand bull-fight has been held in the plaza at Madrid, in the presence of his most Catholic Majesty, Don Felipe ; and by the black eyes of my mistress it was a glorious sight !”

“ No doubt of it, most veracious Dom Diego Caravaja,” rejoined a byestander,

turning round, and disclosing the cynical countenance of the Sorbonist. “ But what brings you here, my hidalgo ? I was told you had entered into the service of Ruggieri, on the last day of his compact with Sathanas, and were to be hanged from the walls of the Grand Châtelet, at the precise juncture, that the fagots of the old sorcerer were lighted in the place de Grève. Pardieu ! I am glad to find I was misinformed.”

“ Never believe idle rumours, amigo,” said the Spaniard, twisting his moustache after a threatening fashion. “ Ruggieri is free ; and the hemp is yet unsown, that shall form my halter. I, the familiar of a magician,—foh ! Hark ye, compañero,” added he, mysteriously, “ I am in the service of the Queen-Mother.”

“ You have quitted the devil then for his dam,” replied the Sorbonist, with a sneering laugh. “ But i’faith man, whether you have escaped the noose of the hangman, or the clutches of the fiend, I am delighted to see

you. I am only sorry we shall lose the agreeable spectacle of your master's—I beg pardon, Ruggieri's execution. Because I had a wager with our comrade, the Bernardin, who stands by my side, that the Prince of Darkness would, as a matter of policy, deliver so servicable an agent from the midst of his fiery torment."

" Which wager you have indubitably lost, compaing," laughed the Bernardin, " for the black Prince has clearly interfered in his behalf by releasing him before he has even snuffed the odours of the resinous torches. *Pile et croix!* I would you had laid a like stake on Caravaja. I should have been a double winner —ho!—ho!"

" Whoso wagereth on my neck had better look to his own," said the Spaniard, coolly, at the same time tapping the hilt of his long Toledo in a significant manner, " or there may be more slitting, than choking of wesands." A truce, however, to jesting. I am in no mood for it. In regard to the execution, you will

not be disappointed, señors. The Prés-aux-clercs will not want a bonfire to-night. Ruggieri's name has been erased from the warrant, and that of Florent Chrétien substituted."

"*Io triumphe! let me embrace thee for the intelligence,*" cried the Sorbonist. "I had vowed that old sinner's destruction. Better one heretic should perish than a thousand sorcerers. There is some hope of the conversion of the latter. Besides, it will be a pleasant pastime to him.

*Tormenta, carcer, ungulæ,
Stridensque flammis lamina,
Atque ipsa pœnarum ultima
Mors Lutheranis ludus est—
Ridebat hæc miles Dei."*

"Chito!" whispered Caravaja, placing his finger on his lips, and again assuming a mysterious air, "this is not the only spectacle you will behold to-night."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Sorbonist elevating his eyebrows into an expression of surprise, "what goodly sight is in reserve?"

" May I trust you ? " demanded the Spaniard, yet more mysteriously.

" You may, if your disclosure be not treasonable," returned the Scholar, mimicking the tone and gesture of his companion.

" Treasonable, or not, I *will* confide in you," replied Caravaja in a low voice, " see you these rose-nobles," added he, thrusting his hand into his doublet and exhibiting, under the shadow of his cloak, which he held over them, a glittering handful to the greedy eyes of his companion.

" Whose throat are you bribed to cut ? " asked the Sorbonist, spitefully.

" Thine, if thou amendest not thy speech, amigo. But listen to me and I will tell thee how to replenish thine empty pouches. I have discovered the true El Dorado. Lend me thine ear."

The Sorbonist complied. He soon became deeply interested in Caravaja's communication

“ And is this to take place to-night ?”
inquired he, as the Spaniard concluded.

Caravaja nodded.

“ And the whole court is to be turned
topsyturvy ?”

Caravaja nodded again.

“ And thine office—our office, I should
say—if I join you—is—the word sticks in my
throat—the assassination of Crichton ?”

Caravaja nodded for the third time, adding
a slight cough by way of emphasis.

“ By Barrabas ! I like it not,” said the
Sorbonist, as if struck with contrition. “ I
would not stick at a trifle—but this is crime
on too grand a scale for my fancy.”

“ Choose,” returned Caravaja, pointing
alternately to the purse and a poignard. “ I
have but to name thee to one of Catherine’s
mouchards, (of whom there are plenty around
us) and the chances are shrewdly against
thy reaching the Sorbonne in time for ves-
pers.”

“ Of two evils the wise man electeth the

lesser," replied the Scholar. "After all, one King is as good as another. *Le roi est mort — vive le roi!* I am with you. I will be a conspirator. There is something antique and Roman in the idea of overthrowing a tyrant. It will be as amusing as the *jeu de coupe-tête*."

"*Bueno!*" exclaimed the Spaniard, "tonight thou shalt help to rid us of a foe. To-morrow thou may'st, peradventure, fill the place of one of these minions of the Sybarite. The scarf I will give thee anon. The word is—"

"Hark!" cried the Bernardin interrupting their conference. "The sport is about to begin. You will lose it altogether if you stand so much aloof. May the devil direct the bull's horns to the heart of that accursed hound for the fright he gave me at the disputation yesterday!"

Leaving these worthies to struggle for a good station to view the fight, we shall now return to the arena.

Druid, meantime, had not remained in-

active. No fiery champion ever evinced more impatience, at the sound of hostile bugle, than he displayed on hearing the roaring challenge of the bull. His fury could scarcely be restrained ; and his efforts to break loose became, at length, so violent, that Blount was compelled to take him in his arms, and forcibly restrain him. Covered with dust and blood—the thick gore slowly dropping from his unstanch'd wounds, his head swollen, his right eye closed—the poor brute presented a deplorable spectacle. But neither suffering nor exhaustion affected his courage—he was still fierce and terrible as heretofore. To the questions put by the youthful nobles, by whom he was surrounded, the Englishman refused all response ; until the Vicomte de Joyeuse casually remarked, “ that it was impossible the dog could fight long in that condition—he must speedily give in.”

A slight smile of derision passed across Blount's features.

"I would I were as sure of my freedom as I am of Druid's endurance," said he. "He is thorough-bred. And I would stake my life (if my life were my own to stake), that when once he has fastened himself upon the bull, nothing will move him. You may hew him in pieces, from tail to jowl; and, while life lasts, the fangs will cling."

The nobles were laughing loudly at this boast, when Henri III., attended by Crichton, who still continued on foot, approached.

"Thy hound is in a sorry condition, maître," said the King in a compassionate tone, "dost think he will face his foe?"

"I am assured of it, Sire," replied Blount.

"Thou hast vaunted his courage," continued Henri, "if he is victorious I give thee free pardon. If he loseth the battle thou diest."

"I am well contented," answered the Englishman.

The monarch and his retinue then proceeded

to take up a position immediately in front of the bull, leaving an interval of some ten paces between them and the enraged animal, who eyed their movements with a look of malignant curiosity ; redoubling his clamour, and vainly endeavouring to disengage himself from his bondage. All at once he became still—his glaring orbs seemed fascinated ; he ceased bellowing ; and giving a loud snort, that scattered the foam over his dusky shoulders, lowered the points of his horns.

The spectators next beheld a man, bearing a dog in his arms, advance from the ranks. At his approach the bull brought his broad front almost to a level with the sand.

Like his antagonist, the dog had left off growling. There was something formidable in the sudden silence of these two savage beasts, who had up to that moment filled the tilt-yard with their roaring.

Arrived within fitting distance of the hostile party, Blount deposited his bur-

then upon the ground. “Upon him!” cried he, “thy country’s honour is at stake.”

But Druid stirred not.

“How sir!” exclaimed Blount, angrily, “has thy valour degenerated since I brought thee to this craven country? ha! I see,” added he, changing his manner, “*I* am to blame, not thou.”

Upon which he clapped his hands together smartly, twice or thrice, and uttered a shrill and peculiar cry.

Exasperated by these sounds the bull slightly raised his head. The instant he did so, Druid, who had watched his opportunity, sprang furiously upon him, and made good his hold by fixing his teeth in the thick and fleshy covering of his antagonist’s eye. Bellowing with rage and pain, the wounded animal sought to free himself from his persecutor by violently dashing his head to the earth, plunging it between his legs, shaking and tossing it in the air. His efforts

were in vain. Crushed, bruised, and gored,
Druid relinquished not his gripe.

The spectators were in ecstasies. Henri III. laughed till the tears filled his eyes. The Bourbon, who stood on his right hand, appeared equally to enjoy the spectacle.

“ By my bauble!” cried Chicot, thrusting himself between the steeds of the two monarchs. “ ‘Tis royal sport!—and worthy its illustrious beholders. A goodly conclusion to a chivalrous spectacle —ha — ha. — The *sotie* after the tragedy—the charivari after the widow’s espousals.—May it end as well as it hath begun! Yon huge cornuto,” added he, darting a malicious glance at the King of Navarre, “ appears, as yet, to have the worst of it.”

“ Rail on, knave,” returned the Bourbon, laughing good humouredly, “ thou art welcome.”

“ Fear me not,” rejoined Chicot, “ I am of the bull-dog breed myself:

Ut canis a corio nunquam absterrebitur uncto,

I never relax—once bite, hold tight. Attend !”

The horns of a bull,
The sword of a fool,
The heels of a mule,
Make a King of Misrule.
But of crown should he be shorn,
Who weareth wittol’s horn ;
Better queen had never suckled him,
Than other *quean* should cuckold him !”

The Jester did not wait to see what effect these ribald strains produced upon the subject of his satire, but, diving under the charger of his own sovereign, disappeared.

A loud shout was now raised. The bull had obtained a momentary advantage over his assailant. By a tremendous effort—attended with considerable detriment to his own hide—he succeeded in dislodging Druid, whom he flung to a great height above his head. Fortunately, the brave hound escaped the deadly points that awaited his descent, but he fell so heavily to the ground that few

imagined he would rise to renew the conflict : —an opinion, which was further strengthened when the bull, bending his knees, dropped upon Druid's body before he had time to recover himself, and strove to crush him by his ponderous weight. At this juncture the voice of the Englishman was heard in encouragement of his luckless companion.

“ What ho ! Druid — what ho ! ” cried he—“ bestir thyself, or the knees of that accursed brute will force all the breath from thy body. By Saint Dunstan ! I can scarcely forbear my hand. Up ! man—and rouse thee—or it is all over with both of us.”

Henri III. was no less disturbed.

“ Mortdieu ! ” ejaculated he, “ the brave hound will be slain, and I shall lose one, who might have proved my trustiest follower. Fool that I was to command this fight.”

“ Had you not better throw down your warder, gossip ? ” said Chicot, suddenly

appearing on the left hand of the King, “the chivalrous bull will probably attend to your behests—and withhold the stroke of mercy. Down with it!—the base cur yields.”

“ ‘Tis false, thou yelping limmer, he does *not* yield,” exclaimed Crichton, who, stationed also on the left of Henri III., had watched the contest with lively interest. “ See’st thou not the maddened beast hath, in the blindness of his fury, driven his horns deeply into the soil, and not into the dog’s reins. And mark how Druid struggles with his huge oppressor like Typhon with the rocks of Jove—or Hercules with the Cretan bull. Look! he *has* extricated himself!—ha!—bravely done!—bravely done!—to the assault! staunch hound—to the assault!—Fix thy keen and tenacious fangs within his leatheren nostrils. ‘Tis done!—’tis done!—there thou wilt cling till thy foe sinks from exhaustion. The victory is thine. By Saint Andrew!” added he, with warmth, “ I would

rather assail the bull myself, than that noble hound should perish."

"Your assistance is needless," replied Joyeuse, whose hilarity, occasioned by Druid's recent perilous position, had become overcast by the present aspect of the fray, "I fear I shall lose my wager as well as my charger."

"Certes, if you have backed the bull, you will infallibly do so," said the Scot, laughing, "for see! even now he staggers, and exhibits symptoms of faintness."

"There I differ with you, mon cher," rejoined the King, "to me he appears as if he were collecting his energies for some mighty effort. Remember, this is no stall-fed, scant-winded, steer."

Druid, as the reader will have gathered from the foregoing discourse, had again made good his hold upon the nostrils of his antagonist; and such was the effect of his combined weight and strength, that he contrived to

detain the bull, for some little space, in the kneeling posture he had just assumed. No sooner, however, did the latter animal regain his feet, than, nigh-frantic with wrath and agony, he resorted to every expedient that desperation suggested, of freeing himself from his relentless assailant. Worn out, at length, with repeated fruitless attempts, he became comparatively tranquil; and it was this cessation from strife that Crichton had construed into relaxing energy, but which was rather, as the King had surmised, the preparation for a mightier struggle.

“Saint George for England!” shouted Blount, whose sanguine anticipations had, also, deceived him—“the victory is our’s. A few minutes must decide the conflict—hurrah!”

But the next moment the Englishman’s countenance fell—the smile of exultation fled from his lips. He perceived his error. Renewing the combat with a fury that showed

his vigour was undiminished the bull tore the ground with his hoofs—filled the air with his blatant cries—tossed his head as if a thousand hornets were buzzing about his ears—and shook the stake to which he was attached, as if he would uproot it.

“Cornes de Diable!” screamed Chicot, “’tis a pleasant sight to witness the fantastic gambols of yon amiable beast—and equally diverting to listen to his music. Fore-heaven he danceth the couranto more deftly than the Chevalier Crichton — ha! — ha! —ho!—”

“Is the fastening secure think you, mon cher Crichton?” said Henri III., noticing with uneasiness the violent strain produced upon the rope by the ceaseless struggles of the bull.

“Have no fear, Sire!” returned the Scot, advancing a step or two in front of the King, “I will place myself between your Majesty and the possibility of harm.”

"Gramercy," rejoined Henri, smiling graciously, "and calling to mind your former exploit in the Court of Animals (which, *en passant*, cost me somewhat dear in the life of my noblest lion) I cannot doubt your ability to cope with a beast of inferior power. I shall, therefore, rest under your protection as securely as behind a rampart."

"Vivat!" cried Joyeuse—"the bull wins!"

"And the calf," added Chicot.

As he spoke the applauses, resounding on all sides, were suddenly checked, and a wild cry of alarm, mingled with screams from the female portion of the assemblage, arose. Druid was again tossed aloft, and the bull, instead of awaiting his fall to gore and trample him as heretofore, gave a headlong dash of such force that the rope, though of almost cable thickness, snapped in twain close to his throat, and, thus liberated, the animal commenced a mad scamper on the arena. The first obstacle he encountered was Blount, whom he instantly overthrew. He

paused not, however, to molest him, but rushed in the direction of Henri III.

“The king!—the king!” cried a thousand eager voices.—“Save the king!”

But this seemed impossible. Ere a pike could be hurled—a bolt fired—or a sword drawn, the bull had reached the spot occupied by the monarch; and Henri’s destruction had been inevitable had not an arm of iron interposed between him and the danger with which he was menaced. That arm was Crichton’s, who threw himself, unhesitatingly, upon the furious animal, and seizing his wrinkled horns, by the exertion of his almost superhuman strength, arrested his career.

Amid the turmoil that ensued the voice of the Scot was heard sternly exclaiming, “let no one touch him—I will achieve his subjection alone.”

Thus admonished, the crowds, who had flocked to his assistance, drew back.

The struggles of the bull were desperate—

but unavailing. He could neither liberate himself, nor advance. Suddenly, from acting on the defensive, Crichton became the assailant. Calling into play all the energies of his muscular frame he forcibly drove his opponent backwards.

“It is time to bring this conflict to a close,” thought he, holding the bull’s head, immovably, with his right hand, while with his left he sought his poignard.

He then glanced towards the King. Surrounded by the bristling halberts of his guard, Henri looked on at his ease.

“*Policem verto,*” cried Chicot, “let him dispatch his enemy, compère.”

The royal assent given, scarce another moment elapsed before the bull, mortally wounded by a blow dexterously stricken between the vertebræ of the neck, fell to the ground.

Thunders of applause succeeded.

The royal cortège then formed into two

lines, and Henri rode forth to greet his preserver.

“ Chevalier Crichton,” said he, “ to you I owe my life. No Valois was ever ungrateful. Claim some boon, I pray you, at my hands.”

“ Sire,” replied Crichton, smiling, as he unhelped himself to wipe the dust and heat from his brow, “ my demands will not exhaust your treasury. I ask only the life of that man,” added he, pointing to Blount, who, with folded arms, and a dejected air, stood alternately regarding the carcase of the bull, and Druid, who, stunned by his fall, had with difficulty limped to his feet; “ he will suffer punishment enough in the mortification occasioned by his dog’s defeat.”

“ It is your’s,” replied Henri.

“ Your Majesty will not separate the faithful hound from his master,” continued the Scot.

“ As you please,” sighed the Monarch,
“ I cannot refuse your request.”

Crichton threw himself upon his knee
and pressed Henri’s hand gratefully to his
lips.

“ My thousand pistoles, Saint-Luc,” said
Joyeuse, gleefully.

“ They are not fairly won,” replied Saint-
Luc. “ I appeal to D’Épernon.”

“ Tis a drawn wager,” returned the Baron ;
“ and in future I recommend both of you to
back a Scottish right arm against bull, or
bull-dog.”

CHAPTER XII.

 THE PRIZE.

Quand ilz furent tous devant sa presence,
Et à genoulx pour sa face choisir,
Le roy d'armes en très grant reverence
Lui dit ce qu'il s'ensuit, et à loisir :
Sire, aveques le vostre bon plaisir
Et licence d'autre part obtenue,
La pastourelle est devant vous venue
Pour le grant pris delivrer orendroit
A cellui qui sans doutance y a droit,
Et de dehors deservi l'ara mieux.

LOUIS DE BEAUVEAU. *Le pas de la Bergière.*

Two sergeants of the guard now advanced leading a steed, to which the carcase of the slaughtered bull was promptly attached by means of cords, and dragged out of the arena.

A pursuivant-at-arms, clothed in a sumptuous casaque flowered with the lilies of France, next approached ; and, reverentially inclining himself before Henri, demanded, in the name of the Queen of the Lists, his Majesty's licence to close the jousts. Permission being graciously accorded, the pursuivant, accompanied by a couple of trumpeters, who gallantly did their devoir, proceeded towards the pavilions, and removing the shields of the combatants, delivered that of Crichton to his esquire. This done, the judges of the field, marshalled by Montjoie descended from their tribunal, and gravely directed their course towards the grand gallery, into which they were ceremoniously ushered.

Crichton, meantime, looked on in silence. Indescribable emotions swelled his bosom. The stirring notes of the trumpet re-kindled all his fire. Much as he had done to distinguish himself he burnt for new opportunities of displaying his prowess, and would

gladly have splintered another lance in honour of the bright eyes he worshipped. “What would life be,” ran his self-communion, “without ambition—without fame—without love?—hopeless slavery—and prolonged torture. For one I could endure not its burthen. My life shall be computed by days, not years; with me hours shall play the part of days—moments of hours. I will crowd into each moment as much of active existence as that moment will comprehend, nor will I know pause till fate shall for ever check my impulses. I reverence age; but I desire not its honours. I would rather die covered with glory than bowed down by years. Were I to perish now I should have lived long enough. And if I can achieve the deliverance of her, to whose love my heart is forbidden to aspire—but for whom alone it can ever beat; if I can free yon brave monarch from his thraldom; and that inconstant, yet not ungenerous voluptuary, from the peril in which

he stands—I care not if this day be my last.” As these thoughts swept through his mind, the countenance of the Scot, (ever the faithful mirror of his* emotions) took a slight cast of sadness; and Henri, inspired by jealousy, having narrowly scrutinized his features during this momentary reverie, fancied he could detect the secrets of his inmost soul.

“ It will not do to trust him,” thought the king, “ his passion is stronger than his loyalty. Hola! Chevalier Crichton,” added he aloud, and in a tone of raillery, “ while you are studying your next ode, or preparing a thesis for the schools, we, less philosophical, less poetical mortals, are dreaming only of the speedy appearance of the Queen of the Lists to award the chief prize of the tourney. We have some notion upon whom it will be bestowed. Attend us to the tribunal. Lovers as we are of etiquette, it would ill become us to break through prescribed forms upon an occasion like the present, when we have fairer dame

to grace our lists than ever yet rewarded valour, and braver knight to receive the meed of victory than ever yet won prize from dame ! ”

With this high-flown compliment, Henri rode slowly towards the canopy, where he dismounted and took his seat upon the fauteuil, placing the King of Navarre on the tabouret at his right. Crichton remained standing on the lowest step of the scaffold.

Presently the inspiring bruit of clarions and other martial instruments was heard from that quarter of the tilt-yard, in which the grand gallery was situated. The barriers were hastily removed ; the halberdiers ranged themselves *en haie* ; and admittance was given to a troop of fair equestrians, whose personal charms were scarcely less to be apprehended than the weapons of their knightly predecessors. At the head of this radiant band, which, like the burst of a sunbeam, diffused smiles and animation as

it proceeded, three figures were distinguished, each so beautiful, yet each so different in style of beauty, that the admiration of the beholders was divided, and the judgment perplexed, as to whom the palm of surpassing loveliness ought to be assigned. In the fine and delicate features; the exquisite fairness of complexion; the soft blue eyes and gentle regards of her who rode on the right, the spectators recognised and hailed their queen, the virtuous, but lightly-esteemed Louise. In the fuller form, and more majestic deportment; in the ravishing grace, the jetty tresses, and dark languid glances of the queenly dame on the left, no one failed to detect the gorgeous Marguerite de Valois. Murmurs of impassioned homage pursued her. The very air respired of love as she passed; and there was not a cavalier of the thousands who gazed upon her, but would have perilled his life for a favouring regard. Marguerite, however, was insensible to the general idolatry.

A smile was on her lips ; witchery was in her looks ; but in her heart raged the undying worm of jealousy.

Between the two queens, on an Isabelle-coloured palfrey, richly caparisoned with blue velvet bordered with pearls, rode Esclairmonde ; and if a preference *was* shown by the assemblage, it was towards the lovely Princess ; whose attractions, although they did not excite the fiery admiration, roused by the voluptuous fascinations of Marguerite de Valois, awakened a sentiment of far deeper devotion. Immediately behind this captivating trio rode Catherine de Medicis, who displayed the admirable symmetry of person for which she was celebrated (a charm not to be impaired by time) as well as the proficiency as an equestrian, for which she was equally noted, in the management of a fiery Arabian. In the languishing looks of the beautiful blonde, on the left of the Queen-Mother, the King of Navarre was at no loss to discover his new conquest, La

Rebours ; while, in the sprightly brunette at her right, admirers too numerous to particularize, claimed a more intimate acquaintance with Torigni.

Preceding the Princess of Condé, and bearing a white wand, together with the grand prize of the tourney, a magnificent diamond ring, which he ostentatiously displayed to the spectators, marched the *pursuivant*. The judges of the camp, headed by Montjoie, and followed by a band of pages and trumpeters, brought up the rear of this brilliant cavalcade.

Arrived within a short distance of the royal canopy, the jocund troop came to a halt ; and formed a long line in front of the king of which Esclairmonde constituted the centre. Rapid as thought, the page of each dame, attired in her colours, then advanced, and placed himself at the bridle of her steed. Executed with great precision and quickness this manœuvre produced an agreeable effect ; and was loudly applauded by

the gallant Bourbon, whose eye wandered over the fair phalanx in a manner that plainly evinced of what inflammable material his valiant heart was composed.

“ *Ventre - saint - gris!* ” ejaculated he, “ such a legion would be irresistible.” Just then his ardent gaze chanced upon his queen. “ *Peste!* ” added he, averting his glances, “ the snake *will* always intrude itself into Eden.”

It was, in sooth, a pleasant sight to look upon that array of lovely dames (Catherine’s famous “ *petit bande* ”), and to mark their different attractions, now so forcibly, yet so advantageously contrasted—each acting as a foil to the other—each unconsciously contributing to her neighbour’s fascination. Oh! how various are the aspects of beauty—how beautiful are all its aspects. Taken individually, we might offer an opinion: collectively, it is out of our power. So we pass on.

Making his way through the press

Montjoie now bent the knee before Henri, and repeating a formula similar to that of the pursuivant, entreated permission for the Queen of the Lists to award the prize to him, who had demeaned himself the most valiantly in the jousts; concluding with the almost unnecessary assurance that all would be done "with loyalty and justice." To this solicitation Henri vouchsafed a gracious response, and the king-of-arms having fulfilled his duty retired.

Holding the bridle of Esclairmonde's palfrey the pursuivant next led her towards Crichton, who, perceiving the intention of the Princess, advanced to meet her, and threw himself at her feet. Taking the ring from the pursuivant Esclairmonde, then placed it upon the finger of her lover. The Scot joyously arose. The reward to which he looked forward with most eagerness was yet to be conferred.

Amid the thunder of acclamations that succeeded, the voices of the heralds were

heard exclaiming, “ A Crichton!—a Crichton!—lagesse! lagesse! ”

The Scot motioned to his esquire. Raising the shield of his master, the youth filled it with broad golden pieces, which he distributed amongst the officers of the tilt-yard, who thereupon redoubled their joyous vociferations.

While this was passing, Montjoie, with a stately step, drew near the principal group of this vast and resplendent picture.

“ Remove your helm, Sir Knight,” said he, “ the Queen of the Lists desires to thank you for the fair courses you have run in her honour—and to bestow upon you the priceless reward of your prowess.”

A deep blush mantled Esclairmonde’s cheek as Crichton obeyed the injunctions of the king-of-arms. The next moment he felt the glowing lips of the Princess pressed upon his brow. That salute annihilated all his prudential resolutions. He forgot their disparity of rank — his own danger — her

perilous position. He relinquished not the hand she had confided to him—but, in the delirium of the moment, raised it to his lips.

Esclairmonde was equally agitated. Suf-fused with blushes, and anon becoming white as marble, palpitating, faint, she could scarcely maintain her seat upon the unruly palfrey; and, in order to prevent mis-chance, Crichton deemed it necessary to pass his arm around her waist. The situation was rather embarrassing, and awakened the ire of the two monarchs.

“ Esclairmonde,” whispered Crichton, passionately, “ you are mine.”

“ I am—I am—” returned the Princess, in the same tone. “ I would abandon my newly-discovered title—my rank—life itself, rather than my love.”

“ I have the Queen’s assent to our es-pousals,” rejoined Crichton, in an altered voice. “ She has promised me your hand—on certain conditions.”

“On what conditions?” asked Esclairmonde, tenderly regarding her lover.

“Conditions, which I cannot, dare not fulfil—conditions, which involve the sacrifice of my honour,” replied Crichton, gloomily. “Esclairmonde,” added he, in accents of despair, “the dream is passed. You are the Princess of Condé. It is madness to indulge these vain hopes longer. I may serve you—but I may *not* love you—Farewell!”

“Stay!” exclaimed the Princess, detaining him with a gentle grasp, “I have a painful—a dreadful duty to fulfil to-night. I have to take an eternal farewell of one who has been a friend, an adviser, a father to me.”

“Of Florent Chrétien?”

“Intelligence of the martyrdom to which he is adjudged by the merciless Catherine has just reached me. An hour before midnight I shall be within his cell to receive his parting benediction,” added she with some hesitation, and gazing at the Scot with eyes that swam with tears.

"Were it to encounter certain destruction I would be there," replied the Scot, fervently.

"And you *will* encounter certain destruction if you carry this presumptuous passion further, Chevalier Crichton," said Henri of Navarre, advancing towards them. "You cannot plead ignorance of the exalted station of the maiden to whose love you aspire. The bright blood of the Bourbon will never mingle with that of a Scottish adventurer. Your pardon, fair cousin," continued he, addressing Esclairmonde in a conciliatory tone, "it is with extreme reluctance that I interfere in an affair of the heart. I would rather forward a lover's suit than oppose it, especially the suit of a cavalier so accomplished as Crichton. But I must act as the Prince of Condé would (under the circumstances) have acted. Take this decision then from his lips. The daughter of Louis of Bourbon can only bestow her hand upon her equal."

“ The daughter of Louis of Bourbon will only bestow her hand upon him she loves,” returned Esclairmonde, with a spirit, such as she had never before exhibited; “ and your own experience of her race will inform you, Sire, that her heart is as little likely to be controlled as her hand.”

“ As I expected,” rejoined the Bourbon, “ but it cannot be. It is one of the curses of exalted birth, that the hand and the heart can never go together.”

“ And why should they be divided in this case,” asked Catherine de Medicis, advancing, if our consent be given to the match ? ”

“ For a sufficient reason, Madame,” said Henri III., joining the group, because *our* pleasure is otherwise ; and because we forbid the Chevalier Crichton, on pain of banishment from our presence—from our kingdom—as he would escape the doom of a traitor, and a dungeon within the Bastille—again to approach the Demoiselle Esclairmonde in the

character of a lover. We shall see whether he, or you, Madame, will venture to disobey us."

"Henri!" exclaimed Catherine, in amazement—"this to me."

"You are our mother—but you are also our subject Madame," returned the King, coldly. "We have issued our commands—it is for you to see them obeyed."

Catherine replied not. Her glance fell upon Crichton, and an almost imperceptible smile passed across her features. At the threat of the monarch the Scot's hand instinctively sought his poignard upon the hilt of which it now rested. When, too late, he perceived his error, and the false construction put upon the action by the Queen.

"If you will set at rest the question as to the illustrious birth of the Demoiselle Esclairmonde, Madame, I am content to obey the mandates of the King?" said Crichton. "On your decision," added he, with a significant look, "must rest her fate."

“The time is arrived for the acknowledgment of her birth, which you have truly said *is* illustrious, messire,” replied Catherine, glancing triumphantly at her son, “Esclairmonde is a Princess of the blood royal of France. She is a Bourbon. Let the King of Navarre take note of my words; let all remember them; and let those, who reverence the memory of Louis I., Prince of Condé, incline themselves before his daughter.”

Obedient to the intimation of Catherine a crowd of nobles pressed forward to kiss the hand of the newly-discovered Princess; and many there were, who, upon that occasion, forgot their ancient enmity towards the great champion of the Protestant Church in the admiration excited by his lovely descendant.

“Well, Sire,” said the Bourbon, turning to Henri III. “*I* have found the Princess. Of course *you* will find the convoy.”

“Peste!” exclaimed Henri, angrily. And motioning to Du Halde, he issued his commands to close the jousts.

“The Princess is yours,” said the Queen-mother aside to Crichton. This assurance, however, gave little encouragement to the Scot. He felt that his passion was hopeless. And the despair, which love without hope must ever inspire took possession of his soul.

The flourish of trumpets which immediately succeeded afforded some relief to his oppression.

Silence being proclaimed by this warlike prelude, the pursuivant advanced, wand in hand, and uttering thrice the preliminary “*Oiez*,” informed the noble assemblage that the jousts were brought to a conclusion—that his Majesty bade them all to the banquet within the Louvre—and that in lieu of the emprise of the Châtel de la Joyeuse Garde, and the grand mêlée by torchlight, the King would hold a masque and fête within the palace.

This announcement was received with general surprise and chagrin.

“ How is this, my son ? ” said Catherine, in a troubled voice. “ Have you abandoned the chivalrous spectacle to which you looked forward with so much pleasure ? Methought you were about to exhibit your own matchless skill as a tilter in the *courses à la foule*.”

“ Par la Mortdieu, madame, replied the King in a tone of raillery, “ the masque will be more in character with the strange scene we have just witnessed than the mêlée. Besides the tilt-yard is not the theatre for our display. The lists are unlucky to our race. We remember our father’s fate—and shall in future avoid the lance.”

“ Ha ! betrayed,” muttered Catherine. “ But the traitor shall not escape my vengeance.”

“ To the Hôtel de Nevers, mon cher,” said Henri, turning to Crichton, “ and arrest the Prince of Mantua. Interfere not with

our passion," added he in his blandest accents, " and we have no favour to refuse you."

Amid renewed fanfares of trumpets, the splendid assemblage then separated. The troop of laughing dames returned not in the strict array it came. The ranks were disordered, and in place of a page, by the side of each bright-eyed equestrian rode a favoured cavalier.

" Henri III. took the lead with the reluctant Princess of Condé; the Bourbon attached himself to La Rebours; while Crichton returned to the pavilion, where the armourer proceeded to free him from his knightly habiliments.

As the two monarchs quitted the tilt-yard, loud shouts were raised of "*Vive le roi!* *vivent les rois!*"

" You hear, Rosni," said the Bourbon, addressing his counsellor. "*Vivent le rois!* 'tis a good augury."

By and by three figures alone remained within the precincts of the arena.

“ Since the mêlée is abandoned, thy scheme falls to the ground, my hidalgo,” said the foremost, who was no other than the Sorbonist.

“ Perdition!” exclaimed Caravaja, twisting his moustache, after his wonted ferocious fashion. “ I know not what to think of it. I would give my soul to Sathanas, that that accursed Scot should fall in my way.”

“ The compact is concluded,” said the Bernardin, “ for lo! he appears.”

And as he spoke Crichton, attired in a pourpoint of velvet and short Spanish mantle, issued from the pavilion. He was followed by Blount bearing Druid carefully in his arms, and directed his steps towards the outer court.

“ After him,” cried Caravaja, drawing a knife, and placing it in his sleeve. “ A muerte!”

CHAPTER XIII.

VINCENZO DI GONZAGA.

Le lion a traîné la brebis dans son antre.

VICTOR HUGO. *Le Roi S'amuse.*

WE will now proceed, for a short space, to the Hôtel de Nevers, whither the wounded Prince of Mantua had been transported after the combat.

It was late in the day when Vincenzo awakened from the deep slumber into which he had been thrown by powerful opiates, administered by a skilful professor of the

healing art, who formed part of the household of the Duke his uncle; and it was some time before he could recal the events of the morning. Passing his hand across his brow, he became aware of the scarf with which it was bound—and then suddenly the conviction of the defeat he had sustained, flashed upon his mind. Ere his purpose could be prevented, he sprang suddenly from his couch, and, despite the entreaties of the physician, who sat by his side, sounded a silver call. An attendant, in sable livery, instantly answered the summons.

“ My armour, Andreini,” said the Prince, stalking to and fro with uncertain step, his eyes glaring with the red unnatural lustre of fever—“ my Milan corslet and casque—I will to the lists—they are not yet closed—ha!—maledizione! why am I not obeyed?—my armour, I say, and a bowl of wine?”

“ Altezza!” exclaimed the attendant, looking anxiously towards the physician.

“ Your excellency has need of repose,” said

the man of medicine, “ and I pray you to betake yourself again to your couch. The combat may be renewed upon the morrow. But your wound will not permit you to sustain the weight of your armour to-day.”

“ My wound—ha—ha!” cried Gonzaga, laughing bitterly, “ thou needest not remind me of it. I feel it like the brand of Cain upon my brow. It scorches my brain—and turns my blood to fire. Why was not the blow more surely aimed?—why do I live to find that I am dishonoured?—Curses on my feeble arm that would not second the energies of my heart! And this enemy I spared when he was in my power—suffered him to depart unharmed. Well did Catherine say, that I should live to repent my mistaken generosity. Would that hour were to be again!—Would,” added he, fiercely snatching his sword from the seat on which it lay, “ that his life were at my disposal! I would stab him though he bared his breast to the blow!”

Exhausted by the violence of his emotions and the torture of his wound, the Prince sank upon a fauteuil.

“Altezza,” said Andreini, gliding towards him.

“Off!” cried Gonzaga, pointing his rapier at his breast—“off! and let me die—unavenged.”

“Not unavenged,” said Andreini, in a low voice.

“Ha!” exclaimed Vincenzo, starting to his feet, “wilt thou revenge me?”

“Have I ever failed your highness?” asked Andreini, in a tone of reproach.

“My own hand has never failed me till now,” returned Gonzaga, bitterly, “and can I expect thee to serve me better than I can serve myself. But if my honour is dear to thee—if thou wouldst purchase my friendship and favour—if thou wouldst stand nearer to me than a brother—let not my victor live to boast of his conquest.”

“ By San Longino ! he dies ere midnight,” replied Andreini. “ But your highness hath already one means of vengeance in your power. The Gelosa is within the next chamber.”

“ What ! ” cried Gonzaga, “ is *she* here, and thou hast thus long delayed the intelligence ? Traitor ! —thou hadst but to tell me this to soothe the anguish of my wound, and allay the frenzy of my brain. Bring—drag her hither.”

“ She sleeps my lord,” said the attendant, and a strange smile played upon his sallow features,—“ overcome by fatigue and terror.”

“ Andreini,” said the Prince sternly, “ in that dark hint I recognize the evil counsellor against whom the Duke, my father, warned me. It were an accursed deed.”

“ Monsignore ! ”

“ No matter, who waits within her chamber ? ”

“ Cintio, altezza.”

“ Call him thence—and bring me a goblet of cyprus.”

As Andreini departed to execute his lord’s commands, Gonzaga wrapped a rich brocade robe around his person, and refusing all assistance from the physician, and turning a deaf ear to his remonstrances continued to pace the chamber hastily backwards and forwards, darting eager glances towards the door. The near prospect of gratified revenge, and the accomplishment of his ruthless purposes appeared to give him new strength. He no longer staggered in his gait. His step became firm and composed. His eyes blazed, and his heretofore livid and bloodless cheek, burnt with a hot and angry flush. At this moment Andreini returned, bearing a goblet of wine.

Vincenzo took the chalice and raised it to his lips.

“ Beseech your highness taste it not,” cried the physician, “ I will not answer

for your life if you disobey my injunctions. You will increase the fever raging within your veins, till it becomes uncontrollable madness. As to thee, Andreini," added he, with a menacing look at the attendant, perceiving that his advice was unheeded by the Prince; "if aught of ill occur from this rash act, thou shalt answer to the Duke, my master, for thy indiscreet and reprehensible zeal."

"I acknowledge no other lord, save the Prince Vincenzo, Signor medico," returned Andreini scornfully. "But I will freely submit to any punishment thy master may inflict, if my beverage prove not more efficacious in his highness's cure, than all thy nauseous potions."

"Tarry where thou art, Andreini," said Vincenzo, returning the goblet, emptied of its contents to his attendant. "She is alone," added he in a deep whisper.

"Alone and slumbering heavily," returned

Andreini — “ I took this poignard from her bosom,” added he, delivering it with a darkly-significant look to Vincenzo. “ The bee is now without its sting.”

“ Prince,” cried the physician, throwing himself at Gonzaga’s feet, and clinging to his robe, “ I am aware of your purpose. I have seen the miserable creature whom you would wrong. I have heard her agonizing plaints—she loves you not—she loves another.”

“ Away !” exclaimed Gonzaga, endeavouring to shake off the grasp that detained him.

“ For pity’s sake, do not this disloyal deed,” cried the physician—“ the girl sleeps — the potion I gave her was a powerful opiate.”

Vincenzo laughed bitterly.

“ She hath neither the defence of tears, or cries,” continued the leech, still maintaining his hold upon the garment of the prince.

“ Or steel,” added Andreini, smiling

grimly, and at the same time thrusting the compassionate physician backwards.

“Blessed Virgin have pity upon her!” exclaimed the suppliant, as he fell to the ground.

“Await my return within this chamber,” said the Prince to his attendant; “and take heed yon whining fool stirs not hence.”

Andreini bowed, and ushering Gonzaga to the door, drew his sword, and throwing himself carelessly on a seat, began, with all the delicious intonation peculiar to his clime, to sing the following madrigal of the divine Tasso, then living, though (alas!) an inmate of the hospital of Santa Anna at Ferrara.

The Stolen Kiss.*

I.

To my lady’s casement creeping,
Through my lady’s lattice peeping,
On a couch I find her sleeping.

Dolcemente!

* A very free version of Tasso’s delicious madrigal, the
“*Bacio Involato*.”

And, abashed by so much beauty,
Quick retreat, as seems my duty,

Veramente!

“ Insensate wretch!” cried the physician, regarding him with mingled abhorrence and alarm, “ profane not the verses of the illustrious Torquato by uttering them at such a moment.”

“ The illustrious Torquato hath himself approved my voice,” returned Andreini, laughing, “ I saw him at Ferrara, when I accompanied the prince, my master, as his page, to the court of his brother-in-law, the Duke Alfonso II. ’Twas then the poet taught me the charming canzonet, which you have interrupted. Poor devil! he sings few love ditties now. Where was I? ah!—I remember.

II.

“ Fool!” then runs my meditation,
“ Wherefore all this hesitation?
Profit by her situation.

Prestumente!

“ Wherefore from her lips refrain, man ?
“ Time, once lost, you’ll ne’er regain, man !

Veramente! ”

So thinks his highness, Don Vincenzo—eh
Signor medico ?”

At this moment a dreadful, but stifled
shriek burst from the adjoining chamber.

Andreini placed his finger to his lips in
token of silence.

“ Mother of heaven protect her !” ejacu-
lated the leech, stopping his ears.

For a few seconds Andreini listened inten-
tently for a recurrence of the fearful sound.
But as nothing more was heard, he re-
sumed his song with all his former noncha-
lance—

III.

Straight upon my plan deciding,
Through the casement gently gliding,
In I steal, all fears deriding,

Dolcemente!

And, beside myself with rapture,
Fifty kisses swiftly capture,

Veramente !

Scarcely, however, had he brought the melody to a conclusion, when he was aroused by a gentle tapping against the door, and a voice, which he recognised as that of Ruggieri solicited admittance.

Andreini started to his feet.

“ Diavolo ! the old astrologer here,” cried he, “ his compact with Satan cannot have expired if he has again escaped the stake. Fortunately arrived, good father,” added he, opening the valve. “ I congratulate you upon your deliverance from the estrapade to which I was apprehensive the Chambre Ardente might adjudge you.”

Ruggieri heeded not his greeting, but glanced anxiously round the apartment.

“ The Prince Vincenzo,” cried he, “ is he not here ?”

“ Thou see’st yon couch is empty —

and these chairs," returned Andreini, carelessly.

"Conduct me to him then," said Ruggieri;—"my errand is of life and death, and will not brook delay."

"Were it to save thy soul from Lucifer, thou must abide his return," answered the unmoved attendant. "His highness's orders are peremptory."

"Will nothing tempt thee to transgress them?" asked Ruggieri in a supplicating tone.

"Not all the produce of thy golden Athanor," rejoined Andreini.

"Hath not this diamond lustre in thine eyes?" persisted the astrologer, holding forth a brilliant ring.

"By Hermes! a glorious gem," cried the attendant, with all the rapture of a connoisseur—"and would become my finger bravely. To be plain with you, however, Signor Cosimo, his highness cannot be spoken with at this moment."

“ And wherefore not, good Andreini ? ”

“ Because—but—hist ! —hear you not a
cry ? ”

“ A woman’s scream.”

“ Right.”

“ Proceeding from yon inner chamber.”

“ Right, again.”

“ And the Prince—”

“ Is there.”

“ Tell me his victim’s name—fiends ! —can
it be ? ”

“ You are curious, mio padre.”

“ This ring is yours—her name ? ”

“ I can tell you her calling—if that will
suffice.”

“ Speak then ! ”

“ It is the Gelosa.”

“ Death ! — dishonour ! ” — shrieked the
agonized astrologer, “ why conceal this from
me ? I might have lent her aid ? ”

“ You ! ”

“ I—her father ! ”

VINCENZO DI GONZAGA.

“ You are too late,” returned Andreini, gloomily.

“ Not to avenge her,” cried Ruggieri, in a terrible voice, and snatching his sword from the surprised attendant, he rushed from the chamber.

CHAPTER XIV.

GINEVRA.

Ma fille, qui vaut plus que ne vaut ta couronne,
Ma fille, qui n'avait fait de mal à personne,
Tu me l'as enviée et prise ! tu me l'as
Rendue avec la honte,—et le malheur, hélas !

VICTOR HUGO. *Le Roi S'amuse*

GUIDED by the shrieks of the unfortunate Ginevra, Ruggieri soon discovered the chamber in which she was confined, and hurried thither with the speed of desperation. The door was fastened. Nerved by anguish with a force, unknown since the season of his youth, the astrologer dashed himself against it. In vain. The strong valve resisted his efforts. Made aware by

these sounds that some help was at hand, Ginevra renewed her frantic cries. But as no aid arrived—as no protecting arm interposed itself between her and the violence with which she was threatened ; her voice grew gradually fainter and fainter, until, at length, nothing could be distinguished save moans, and inarticulate lamentations. Andreini had followed the astrologer into the corridor ; but finding that the attempts of the latter to obtain admittance were fruitless, and alarmed by his furious gestures, he deemed it expedient to allow this access of rage and grief to subside before he ventured to approach him. Folding his arms, therefore, carelessly upon his bosom, and supporting himself against a column, he awaited the fitting moment for his intervention. It required all the stoicism of the Italian to view Ruggieri's piteous condition with indifference.

The torture, indeed, of those few horrible minutes had well-nigh driven the astrologer

to actual frenzy. He tore his hair; lacerated his breast; and might, perhaps, have raised his hand against his own life had not the desire of vengeance restrained him. “ My child!—my child!” cried he, in accents of despair, “ I am near thee; I will help thee; avenge thee. I hear thy shrieks, thy plaints, my Ginevra; they pierce my soul; they rend my heart. But this door is of iron strength. I cannot burst it. Hast thou no poignard?” (Andreini smiled) “ Fear not to use it. Hell! the torment of the rack was light compared with the agony I now endure. My child!—my child! thou who wert all purity, all innocence, art defiled, dishonoured. There is madness in the thought. From thy bosom thy father’s rash hand plucked the talisman that was to guard thy virtue—thy mother’s gift. She, who was once as beautiful—once as innocent as thou art. Alas!—her wrongs are fearfully avenged. Hist! what sound was that?” continued he, listening intently; “ that heavy

fall—this dead silence—more frightful even than her groans—horror!—he hath slain her. Powers of darkness! make firm my arm. I will stab him as he comes forth."

At this moment footsteps were heard hastening rapidly along the corridor. Ruggieri turned and beheld Crichton, followed by Blount. The former uttered a joyful exclamation as he recognised the astrologer.

"By Saint-Andrew! this is fortunate," cried he, "thou hast escaped me once to day. But I will place faith in the magical practices, to which thy flight was attributed, if thou escapest me a second time. Up! miscreant, and attend me to the Louvre."

"I will readily attend you monseigneur, whithersoever you may choose to lead me, were it even to the stake prepared for my execution, if you will first aid me to deliver the hapless maiden, for whom you last night adventured your life, from a fate worse than death,"

"Ginevra!" exclaimed Crichton, starting.
"What of her? Wretch, thou hast betrayed

her to infamy. Where is she?—where is the Prince?"

" Within that chamber."

" Follow me."

" The door is firmly barred, or I had not tarried here."

" Ha!"

" Each moment is fraught with horror—for mercy's sake assist her."

Crichton needed no further appeal to his humanity. He looked around. The gallery in which he stood was crowded with the rarest sculpture. Lifting a statue from its pedestal he, unhesitatingly, hurled the marble mass against the valve, which it burst open with a thundering sound.

The first object, which the Scot beheld as he rushed into the room, was the prostrate form of Ginevra, who had fallen with her face upon the ground, deprived of sense and motion. Her luxuriant black tresses floated in the wildest disorder over her person, and formed a more effectual covering than the slight

garment in which she was arrayed. The hands of the wretched maiden were convulsively clenched, as if from agony.

At the further end of the chamber sat the perpetrator of this outrage, haggard and conscience-stricken, with his hand pressed against his brow, and his face averted from his miserable victim. Roused by the crash of the falling door, he started wildly to his feet; putting himself instantly into a posture of defence. But, when he perceived in the vengeful aspect of the foremost of the intruders, the features of the Scot his resolution fled; and, dropping the point of his sword, he staggered backwards.

“ Prince ! ” exclaimed Crichton in a terrible voice, “ when I spared your forfeit life in the tilt-yard this morning, I spared, as I deemed, the life of a loyal knight and honourable gentleman. But had I known the fell purposes of your breast; had I deemed you capable of the

villainy you have since committed, my dagger should have freed the noble house of Gonzaga from one whose name, recreant and infamous, must for ever sully its splendour."

" Be that task mine," ejaculated Ruggieri, springing with tiger fury towards the Prince ; " the name of the felon Vincenzo shall never dishonour the ducal rolls of Mantua."

" Back ! old man," cried the Prince. " I would not have thy blood upon my head."

But the astrologer was not to be thus turned aside. He assailed the Prince with so much vigour, that the latter was fain to call into play all his address in swordmanship to repel the attack. After the exchange of a few vehement passes, Ruggieri's weapon was beaten from his grasp, and he lay at the mercy of his antagonist, who was about to strike, when the deadly thrust was arrested by the rapier of Crichton.

" Deliver up your sword, Prince," cried

the Scot. “ You are my prisoner. In the king’s name I arrest you.”

“ And in the King of Hell’s name I defy you,” returned Vincenzo, laughing scornfully. “ You shall attack my person when you have attained my heart—not till then. Your arrival here,” continued he, in a tone of bitter irony, “ is well-timed. I pardon the intrusion for its opportuneness. I have sworn to rob you of your mistress and your life. My vow is but half fulfilled.”

“ Defend yourself,” exclaimed the Scot, sternly.

Crichton’s object was to disarm the Prince, and in this he speedily succeeded. The violence of Gonzaga availed little against the coolness and superior skill of his antagonist.

“ Strike!” cried Vincenzo, fiercely. “ I yield not — nor would I have shown you mercy had the chance been mine.”

Crichton sheathed his sword.

“ Summon the guard,” said he, disdainfully

turning upon his heel, and addressing Blount.
“ We must to the Louvre.”

The Englishman instantly quitted the chamber.

Gonzaga, who had witnessed this proceeding with evident uneasiness, now raised the silver whistle to his lips. But Andreini replied not to the call. He had retreated on Crichton’s appearance within the gallery.

“ You will find it in vain to oppose the royal mandate, Prince,” said the Scot, with constrained courtesy, “ and I pray you to spare my attendants the necessity of enforcing obedience to it.”

“ The sovereign pleasure, however, unworthily conveyed, shall not be resisted,” returned Vincenzo, haughtily, “ when I am satisfied that you are in possession of such authority.”

“ Behold this signet !” said Crichton.

“ Enough !” replied the Prince. “ Messieurs,” continued he, advancing with a slow and dignified step towards a band of hal-

berdiers, who preceded by Blount now entered the chamber, “I surrender myself into your hands.”

The guard immediately surrounded him.

“Lead forth the prisoner,” said Crichton, whose commands the halberdiers awaited; “and let him be detained within the lower salon until a litter is prepared for his transport to the Louvre. I will join you as soon as I have rendered such aid, as circumstances will admit, to the hapless victim of his depravity.”

“Chevalier Crichton,” said Vincenzo, halting as he arrived at the threshold, “I scorn to ask a favour at your hands—but I shall require the attendance of my follower Andreini.”

“You shall have it, monseigneur,” answered the Scot. “See that the wishes of the Prince are complied with,” continued he, addressing Blount.

The halberdiers then departed in the same order they came, and the sound of their heavy

footsteps presently died away along the corridor.

Ruggieri, meanwhile, after the failure of his attack upon Gonzaga, appeared to abandon all idea of vengeance, and, obeying the impulses of his newly-awakened parental love, knelt down by the side of his daughter, and endeavoured, by every means in his power, to restore animation to her frame. Divesting himself of his loose silken robe, he wrapped it carefully around her person, and gently lifting her head upon his shoulder, removed the long and blinding tresses from her face. As he gazed upon that beautiful countenance—strangely altered in its expression since the moment when he first beheld it, under similar, but less afflicting circumstances—as he noticed the ravages of the spoiler distinctly traceable in the azure streaks that marked the snowy throat of the ill-starred Ginevra—the heart of the miserable father gave way, and bowing his head upon the bosom of his child, his

agony found some relief in an outbreak of overwhelming emotion. From this pitiable state he was aroused by the voice of Cricheton.

“ Ruggieri,” said the Scot in a stern tone, somewhat tempered by compassion, “ touched as I am by your suffering, I cannot allow feelings of a softer nature to interfere with the rigid course of justice. You must, perforce, control your grief, and accompany me to the Louvre. Your testimony is necessary to establish those charges of treasonable conspiracy against the crown, which will to-night be preferred against the Medicis.”

“ Monseigneur,” said Ruggieri, with a supplicating look, “ dispose of my life. It is your’s. I will reveal all to the king—all, monseigneur. I wish to die—to expiate my offences at the stake, or upon the block. But oh ! if mother, sister, or gentle dame, were ever dear to you—by the love you have borne them, suffer me to remove my child to some place of safety; where she

may henceforth hide her shame and linger out her days in undisturbed seclusion. I have already, with far other designs than the present, (heaven forgive me!) bestowed large gifts upon the convent of Saint-Eloi. To the charge of the holy sisterhood will I confide her. That done, I will repair to the Louvre, where I will make such revelations as shall ensure the downfall of Catherine, and the destruction of this accursed Gonzaga. Doubt me not, monseigneur. I have my child to avenge; and I will terribly avenge her. The headsman shall hold high carnival to night. His axe shall be dipped in princely blood; his hand shall efface the stain upon my daughter's honour. Let your guard attend me, or suffer me to go alone. I care not. You may count upon me, as I count upon revenge."

Crichton was, for a moment, lost in reflection.

"Are you assured this hapless maiden is

your daughter?" demanded he, after a brief pause.

" Hear me, monseigneur," replied the astrologer, " had the voice of nature, which, from the moment I first beheld her, pleaded so eloquently in her behalf, been silent within my bosom ; had no yearnings of parental affection instinctively and irresistibly drawn me towards her ; had she borne no resemblance to her ill-fated mother ; whose beauty lives again, as her misfortunes are revived in her wretched offspring ; had these feelings and this likeness been wanting, your discovery and interpretation of the mystic characters engraved upon the talisman, which I (alas !) removed from her neck, would have satisfied me that she was my child. Time has been, monseigneur, when this wasted frame was full of vigour ; when a hot tide coursed within these shrunken veins ; when the freshness of youth bloomed upon these livid cheeks. In that fierce season I loved. Ginevra

Malatesta was of a noble, but reduced family of Mantua. Her charms attracted my attention. My passion was violent as that of the felon Gonzaga. But the agent which I employed to effect my object was gold, not force. Dazzled by my presents, rather than subdued by my entreaties, Ginevra fell. Remorse succeeded. After that guilty hour I never beheld her. My costly gifts were returned. She fled. I traced her to Venice, but could never discover her retreat. Accused of practices of magic and sorcery I was compelled suddenly to quit the Venetian states; and to seek refuge in those of Florence, where I continued in the service of Lorenzo di Medicis, Duke of Urbino, until I was dispatched by him on the death of Henri II. of France to the court of his daughter Catherine. You know my history, monseigneur. It has been a tissue of the darkest crimes. I have been the willing instrument of the Queen-Mother. I have aided her in her projects of ambition. I have

helped to remove her foes. My hand has prepared her poisons; my counsel has directed her schemes; my resolution has confirmed her wavering purposes. I have been the terrible scourge which has lashed the vices of this corrupted court. I have spared none. Human emotion has been a stranger to my breast. In Catherine I recognised a kindred spirit. I have served her faithfully, because through her I could make my power felt. I have wielded every engine which devilish ingenuity could devise to degrade and destroy my fellow men. I have brewed philters; and concocted deadly tinctures. I have sapped the springs of life in man; sullied the purity of woman. I have exulted in my baneful influence. No compunctionous visitings have disturbed me. I have grown old in guilt and impenitence. Alas!" continued he, in a broken voice, "my heart is not so icy and impassive as I deemed it. I would gladly escape from the quickening pangs of conscience in the

tomb. I would willingly do one act of justice ere I die. I would avenge my child, and requite your noble conduct."

"Hush! she revives," interrupted Crichton.

"True," replied Ruggieri, anxiously regarding the features of his daughter, now agitated by a sharp convulsive movement, "she does so. Heaven grant her memory return not with sensibility!"

As he spoke Ginevra opened her eyes. The glances which she threw around showed that her reason was still unsettled.

"Crichton!" ejaculated she, with a deep-drawn sigh—"Crichton! Crichton!"

The Scot took her hand. But, although her gaze was fixed upon him, it was evident she knew him not.

"Ginevra," returned Crichton, in a low and soothing tone, "I am by your side, fear nothing."

The wretched girl instantly withdrew her fingers from his clasp, and passed them hurriedly across her brow.

“ Your are in safety, my child,” said the astrologer, pressing her gently to his bosom, “ no further ill can befall you.”

Ginevra, however, shrank with horror from his caress, and uttered a prolonged and piercing scream.

“ Blessed Jesus have pity upon her!” exclaimed Ruggieri, “ her senses are gone.”

“ No, no, no, I am not mad,” cried Ginevra struggling to escape, “ would I were so. Misery like mine finds no refuge in madness. I am too wretched for frenzy. I know thee well enough. Thou art the pander to that ruthless prince—oh !”—and her voice was broken by her sobs.

“ I am thy father, Ginevra,” returned the astrologer.

“ My father !” repeated Ginevra, bitterly. “ Well then, my father has sold me to dis-honour.”

“ I would have defended thee with my life; I would have slain thy assailant; I would have given each drop of my blood,

rather than a hair of thy head should have been injured."

"Where is the amulet that hung around my neck?" asked Ginevra.

"Alas!" answered the astrologer, "in an evil hour I removed it."

"Thou!" cried Ginevra; "then thou *hast* brought me to shame. Thou art *not* my father—release me."

"I knew not its virtue," rejoined Ruggieri; "I knew not by whom it was bestowed."

"It was my mother's dying gift," said Ginevra; "her malediction falls upon thy head."

"I feel it," said Ruggieri, with a look of anguish; "but pronounced by thy lips, it becomes doubly terrible."

"I am glad of it," returned Ginevra, fiercely, "release me, monster!"

"My child! my child!" implored the agonized astrologer.

"If thou *art* my father set me free, or

stab me," cried Ginevra. " Was it a father's hand," inquired she, in a stern voice, " that removed my poignard as I slept?"

" No, by the memory of thy injured mother!" replied Ruggieri, " I am ignorant of all that has befallen thee, save the last dire calamity,' since thou quitted'st my protection."

" Thy protection!" echoed Ginevra. " Think not to deceive me. My mother told me that my father was one abandoned alike of God and man; that he had bartered his soul to the Demon; that he worshipped false gods; that he practised sorcery and prepared poisons; that he had won her love by magic and devilish artifices; that he had corrupted her soul and body. Art thou that man?"

" I am, Ginevra," answered Ruggieri, in a hollow voice.

" Be thou accursed then, and leave me."

" Whither would'st thou go, my child?

Thou hast no friend on earth save thy wretched father."

" 'Tis false! I have one, who will not abandon me."

" Right!" said the Scot, " in me thou shalt find a brother."

" Crichton!" exclaimed Ginevra. And her head sank upon her bosom.

" She is dead," exclaimed the Scot in alarm; " the shock was too great. I have killed her."

" No, monseigneur," answered Ruggieri, with a melancholy look, " her troubles are not yet over. Have I your permission, while she is yet insensible, to convey her to the convent of Saint-Eloi ?"

" I am perplexed to know what will be for the best," said Crichton, pacing the apartment with hasty strides. " Cosmo Ruggieri," added he, suddenly pausing, " as a father, I repeat, I pity thee. But thy life, even by thy own confession, has been

one long scheme of treachery. Neither to God nor man, to friend or foe, hast thou been true. I will not trust thee."

" Monseigneur," returned Ruggieri, " I do not deserve your suspicions—by my soul! I do not. Grant my request, and you will find me able and prompt to serve you. Refuse me, and the rack shall fail to extort a word from my lips."

Crichton regarded the astrologer fixedly.

" Thy looks are sincere," said he, apparently satisfied with his scrutiny. " Thou shalt go. But not alone. A follower, upon whose fidelity I can rely, shall accompany thee."

" As you will, monseigneur," answered Ruggieri, " I meditate no escape."

" Stir not hence till I return, as thou valuest thy own life, and thy daughter's safety," continued the Scot, authoritatively.

The astrologer replied in the affirmative, and Crichton was about to depart, when his

footsteps were arrested by the cries of Ginevra.

“Leave me not! oh! leave me not! Signor Crichton,” shrieked the distracted girl: “you promised not to abandon me.”

“Nor will I,” answered the Scot, quickly returning; “be pacified, dear Ginevra. If I quit thee for an instant I entrust thee to one who will watch over thee with the fondest care—thy father.”

“It is from him I have most to fear,” cried Ginevra, breaking from the grasp of the astrologer, and throwing herself at Crichton’s feet; “but for him I should not have been the thing of shame I am—but for him I might not have been all unworthy of your love—but for him I might have died with your name upon my lips—but for him—Oh! sweet Signor you know him not—his heart is evil—he regards no ties of honour or affection—he is leagued with that remorseless Prince to destroy me—save me! oh! save me from him.”

"Ginevra," said the Scot, raising her tenderly from the ground, "your brain is bewildered by the suffering you have endured. Gonzaga is my prisoner. He can no longer injure you."

"Alas!" sighed Ginevra, shrinking from the touch of Crichton, and averting her face from his regards, "even *he* will scorn me now."

"His blood shall wash out the wrong he hath done you," said Ruggieri, in a terrible voice, "the hand which thou dreadest, Ginevra, shall redress thy injuries."

"Swear it," exclaimed Ginevra, turning suddenly towards him.

"I swear it," answered Ruggieri, solemnly.

"By the memory of my mother."

"By thy mother's memory! I swear to devote myself to his destruction," replied the astrologer.

"I shall die contented," cried Ginevra, falling upon Ruggieri's neck and bedewing

it with her tears : “ forgive me, father, as I forgive thee.”

“ My child ! ” murmured Ruggieri, straining her to his bosom, “ oh ! if thy mother’s injured spirit could look down upon us now, her forgiveness would, I feel, be extended towards me.”

“ Signor Crichton,” said Ginevra, gently disengaging herself from her father’s embrace, and casting her eyes timidly upon the ground, as she addressed the cherished object of her affection, “ I would, also, implore your pardon.”

“ For what, Ginevra ? ”

“ For having dared to love you.”

“ Rather let *me* implore *your* forgiveness, fond girl, for having unconsciously inspired a passion which has proved fatal to your peace.”

“ You pity me.”

“ From my soul.”

“ I die then happy,” cried Ginevra. And snatching the poignard of the Scot from his

side she would have plunged it to her heart, had not her arm been withheld by Ruggieri.

“Forbear!” exclaimed the astrologer.

“Is this thy tenderness?” said Ginevra, dropping the dagger. “Well,” added she, bitterly, “I *will* live. But it will be to greater misery—greater infamy.”

“Thou shalt find a shelter from both within the shades of a cloister.”

“Never!”

As she uttered this exclamation, rapid footsteps were heard speeding along the corridor, and the next moment Blount rushed into the room.

“We are betrayed,” exclaimed he; “the Prince is at liberty—the guard have thrown down their arms before the order of the Queen-Mother, which has this moment arrived for his release.”

“Gonzaga at liberty—the King’s commands disobeyed—and I here!” ejaculated

Crichton, furiously, at the same time, drawing his sword, “Ruggieri, look to thy daughter.”

“Resistance is in vain,” said Blount, “or I had not returned empty-handed. The palace is filled with the armed retainers of the Duc de Nevers.”

“Ha!”

“An escort is in attendance to convey the Prince on his route to Mantua. He has already entered the litter.”

“Confusion! but he escapes me not,” exclaimed Crichton; “even his own followers dare not refuse obedience to the King’s signet.”

“You are mistaken, Chevalier Crichton,” said Andreini, suddenly appearing at the door; “armed with the authority of the Queen-Mother they will dare anything. In the name of my lord and master the Prince Vincenzo, demand the restitution of that maiden.

“ Stand aside,” returned Crichton, sternly, “ or lead me to your master.”

“ Halberdiers, advance!” exclaimed Andreini. At this command, the entrance was blocked by a troop of men-at-arms, and the points of a dozen partisans were directed against the breast of Crichton.

“ Ha! Saint-Andrew!” cried the Scot, furiously — “ I charge you, in the King’s name, lay down your arms, or look for the punishment of traitors.”

“ In the Queen’s name stand firm,” rejoined Andreini.

Followed by Blount, Crichton was about to effect an egress at the point of the sword when his purpose was checked by a cry of distress from Ruggieri. All her terrors having revived upon Andreini’s appearance, Ginevra had broken from the grasp of the astrologer, and now sought to free herself from an existence which had become a burthen, by flinging herself upon the halberts of the men-at-arms. In avoiding

an imaginary danger, the unfortunate girl rushed upon a real peril. Just as she was about to precipitate herself upon the deadly weapons, Andreini swiftly advanced, and catching her in his arms, instantly retreated through the opening ranks with a roar of triumphant laughter. “Keep him at bay till I rejoin the Prince,” cried he, “and then let him take the road, if he chooses, to Mantua.”

“To the rescue!” shouted Crichton, forcing back the men-at-arms by the vehemence of his assault.

“It is in vain, monseigneur,” cried Ruggieri, “I have lost my child—but I will help you to vengeance. To the Louvre—to the Louvre!”

THE SECOND NIGHT.

February V.

1579.

Quant à la calomnie et à la trahison, nous défendons très-expressément qu'elles soient punies ni châtiées, si ce n'étoit que le Prince souverain s'en voulût mêler pour le bien de son état, mais pour ce qui regarde les particuliers, nous voulons que les nôtres qui auront ces deux perfections soient en honneur et réputation : les uns pour avoir un entregent, les autres une subtilité et gentillesse d'esprit, que l'on reconnoîtra en ce qu'ils seront larges et prodigues en paroles, et chiches en fidélité:

Thomas Artus.

THE SECOND NIGHT.

CHAPTER I.

THE DUNGEON.

Paolo. Aurait-il abjuré ?

Ecli. Pas encor.

Paolo. Mais cet acte il n'est que différé ?

CASIMIR DELAVIGNE. *Une Famille au temps de Luther.*

THE LOUVRE once inclosed within its walls a number of subterranean cells, appropriated to the confinement of prisoners of state. Into one of these gloomy receptacles Florent Chrétien had been thrust. Deprived, by the

rigour of his persecutors, of the consolation which had ever been afforded him in hours of affliction by reference to the “healing balm” of Scripture, the good man passed the brief space allotted to him on earth in deepest prayer. As the time drew nigh when his dreadful sentence was to be carried into execution, his devotions were interrupted by the entrance of one of the hooded officials, who introduced a masked female into the dungeon, and then silently departed. The dull light of a brazen cresset suspended from the ceiling imperfectly illumined the apartment, and a few moments elapsed ere Chrétien, whose eyes had been closed in earnest supplication, could distinguish the muffled object that stood before him.

“Is it you my daughter?” asked he, as the figure remained stationary.

“It is,” replied Esclairmonde, unmasking, “but I feared to disturb your devotions.”

“Approach,” rejoined the preacher; “your name has mingled with my prayers, let your voice also ascend with mine towards the throne of mercy. The sand of my life is almost run out. Each moment is precious. I have much counsel to give you. But ere I offer such precepts for your guidance, as may be needful for the spiritual welfare of one whose passage will be longer than mine own through this Vale of Tears, I would fain invoke a blessing on your head.”

Esclairmonde knelt by his side. The benediction was besought and bestowed. The voice of the Princess joined in the fervent petition for heavenly grace that succeeded. Scarcely, however, was their devout employment brought to a close—scarcely had the holy man begun to address himself to those instructions which he deemed it necessary to impart to his religious pupil, when the door again opened, and the hooded official having introduced another figure enveloped in a

large mantle, departed as noiselessly as he had entered the chamber.

“ He comes ! ” cried Esclairmonde.

“ The executioner ? ” asked Chrétien, calmly.

“ The Chevalier Crichton,” returned the Princess.

“ He here ! ” exclaimed Chrétien, a slight shade passing across his benevolent countenance.

“ He is here to bid me an eternal farewell,” sighed Esclairmonde.

“ Princess of Condé,” said the preacher, with some severity, “ it *must* be an eternal farewell.”

“ You have said it, good father,” replied Esclairmonde, in a tone of sorrowful resignation.

“ Your rank forbids an alliance so disproportionate, even if the Chevalier Crichton’s religious opinions coincided with your own,” pursued Chrétien.

“ Alas!” murmured Esclairmonde, “ our creeds are adverse ; a wide disparity of rank exists between us ; but our hearts are indissolubly united.”

“ You love him then most tenderly, my daughter.”

“ Love him !” echoed the Princess passionately. “ Father, to you I look to strengthen me in the resolution I have taken. This interview is my last.”

“ I will not fail you, my daughter,” replied the old man kindly. “ Think only that he is the enemy of your faith ; and that were you united to him he might interfere with the important services it may hereafter be in your power to render to your persecuted church. The thought that will most alleviate the anguish of my latest moments is, that I have sown the good seed within your bosom, which, in due season, shall bring forth a plenteous harvest for our suffering people. Princess of Condé, promise me solemnly that you will never wed a Papist.”

“ Esclairmonde,” said Crichton, advancing.

“ Hesitate not,” said the Preacher, severely, “ or you are lost. Promise me.”

“ My soul is wedded to the Reformed Faith,” replied the Princess firmly; “ and I here vow never to bestow my hand upon a Catholic.”

“ Amen !” responded Chrétien, fervently.

A deep groan burst from the bosom of the Scot.

“ Chevalier Crichton,” said Esclairmonde, “ you have heard my vow.”

“ I have,” replied the Scot mournfully.

“ Hear me yet further,” continued the Princess. “ My zeal—my love—my gratitude prompt me to lay aside feminine reserve. When I desired that our final interview should take place in the presence of this reverend man, it was that I might address you freely; it was that I might avow my love in the presence of one, whose holier aspirations have not rendered him insensible or indifferent to the frailties of his fellows;

it was," added she, with some hesitation, and blushing deeply as she spoke, "in the hope that our united efforts might induce you to embrace the religion I profess; and that as a convert to a faith, the purity of which your severest judgment must acknowledge, I might, without violation of my conscientious scruples, though in disregard of the elevated position I am compelled to assume, offer you my hand, and request him from whose lips I have imbibed the precepts of truth and humility, which inspire me at this moment, to affiance us together before heaven."

" You have spoken with the voice of inspiration, my daughter," said Chrétien with a benignant smile; " and I have offered no interruption to your words, because they flow from a source whence true wisdom only springs. You have appealed to me in a manner which I cannot resist. Your heart I know is already betrothed to the Chevalier

Crichton. Let him cast off the bondage to which he has so long heedlessly subjected himself. Let him not view religion through the medium of the senses, but by the purer light of the sacred scriptures. Let him abjure the errors and idolatries of Rome; and exert the mighty intellectual powers, with which he has been intrusted for the noblest purposes from on high, in the advancement of the true faith; and your choice shall receive my sanction; your betrothment shall not, for one moment, be delayed."

"Crichton," inquired Esclairmonde, tenderly, "is this our last meeting, or are we for ever united?"

"It is our last," replied the Scot, in a despairing tone—"if the condition annexed to the continuance of our love be my apostacy. Esclairmonde, for you I would make any sacrifice consistent with honour and rectitude of principle. For you I would resign those

projects of ambition, which have hitherto engrossed my soul ; for you I would repress that desire for universal distinction, which has ever formed the ruling passion of my existence ; for you I would be aught but a renegade to my faith—a traitor to my God. Glory has been my guiding star ; my gaze has been steadfastly fixed upon it ; I have steered my bark by its rays. Fame is dearer to me than life ; love is dearer than fame ; but honour is dearer than love.”

“ Crichton !”

“ Listen to me, Esclairmonde. You are the Princess of Condé. Your rank is the most illustrious in France. But that rank has had no influence in engaging my affections. My heart was your’s when our stations were equal ; my heart is your’s now a barrier is placed between us. I can neither cease to love, nor feel increase of passion. To me you are unchanged. To me you are the orphan Esclairmonde. Rank can add nothing to your beauty, as it can

detract nothing from it. To link my fate with yours were to realize the wildest dream of my youthful imagination. It were to attain at once the goal to which I have aspired. It were to raise me to the proudest pinnacle of felicity to which man may attain."

" Reflect," said Chrétien.

" I *have* reflected," returned the Scot. " Think not my fixed resolve upon a point involving my eternal welfare has been the result of inconsiderate caprice;—think not because I have clung to the faith of my fathers, through trials, of which this though the severest, is not the most formidable—think not it has been from a perverse adherence to wrong; think not, because you are strong in your own belief—a belief which I regard as false and pernicious—that I am not equally inflexible. I have disputed on the tenets of my faith with my sage préceptor Buchanan, and he has failed to convince me of my errors. I am a Catholic from the conviction of my conscience. And as such, am as fully prepared as yourself

to embrace the alternative of death rather than departure from that religion which is derived from truth, and sustained by holiest tradition."

"If the great Buchanan has failed to work your conversion, my son, my endeavours must prove ineffectual," returned the preacher, shaking his head, "nevertheless, I will essay—"

"It is in vain," replied Crichton, sternly. "My martyrdom is past—your's is to come, old man. Twice have I endured temptation to-day—twice have I resisted it. The hand of the Princess of Condé was to have been the price of my disloyalty—the same hand has been made a lure to drag me to perdition."

"Say rather to direct you to salvation," rejoined Esclairmonde. "Oh! Crichton, if I have any influence over your heart I would now exert it—if, as the humble instrument of the divine will, I can wean you from the dan-

gerous and idolatrous creed to which you are bigoted, the whole of my future life shall evince the extent of my gratitude and devotion."

" Esclairmonde," exclaimed Crichton, mournfully, " for that creed I have quitted my father's roof—for that creed I have braved a father's malediction—for that creed I now renounce all I hold dear on earth. We must part for ever."

" Crichton, you love me not."

" Let the sacrifice I have just made attest my love," returned the Scot, bitterly. " Tempt me not Esclairmonde. My bosom is torn asunder by conflicting emotions. My brain reels. I cannot support this struggle longer. Your own lips shall seal my fate."

" Be mine then."

A shudder ran through Crichton's frame.

" I am lost," murmured he.

" No, you are saved," replied the Princess, triumphantly, " kneel with me at the feet of this holy man."

“ Hold ! ” exclaimed Chrétien, “ this must not be. Gladly as I would number the Chevalier Crichton among the faithful servants of the true God, his conversion must be accomplished by other influence than that of the passions. Evil means cannot work good ends. The faith which is not the result of conviction is little better than hypocrisy. Differing as I do from him upon essential points of religious credence, I applaud the Chevalier Crichton’s constancy :—nor would I attempt to shake it save by arguments such as my brief span of life will not permit me to employ ; and I must think better of a creed which can strengthen the bosom of one so young against snares and temptations which hoary zealots might have found it difficult to resist.”

“ Your hand has arrested my downfall, good father,” said Crichton.

“ I rejoice at it, my son,” replied the preacher. “ Fly while your resolution still

continues. I would not incur your reproaches. You must part from the Princess, but not, I trust, for ever. A time—not far distant—may arrive when your opinions will undergo a change, and when she may bestow her hand without violating her sacred promise."

A tear stood in Esclairmonde's eye as she regarded her lover, and unable to control herself she fell into his outstretched arms.

"When I uttered that fatal vow, I pronounced my own sentence of death," sighed she.

"Alas!" returned Crichton, "I would have prevented it—but it is now too late."

"It is," rejoined Chrétien, in a severe tone. "Depart quickly. You interrupt my devotions. I would prepare myself for eternity."

"Father," said Crichton, "I trust you will have a longer period for that preparation

than your persecutors would afford you. Your life is of more consequence than mine; the services which you can render the Princess Esclairmonde are greater than I can render her. Live then for her."

" You speak in parables, my son," returned the Preacher in surprise.

" Take this mantle and this ring," said Crichton, " and your evasion is easy. It is the signet of the king. Display it to the guard at the portals of the Louvre, and the gates will fly open at your approach. Waste no time, but muffle up your features and figure in this cloak."

" And you?"

" Heed me not. I will remain here in your stead."

" I cannot accept freedom on such terms my son."

" Hear me, good father," replied Crichton, earnestly. " You go not forth alone. Esclairmonde must accompany you. If she returns to the masque she is lost."

“ Gracious heaven !” exclaimed the Preacher.

“ Henri’s plans [are so contrived, that she cannot escape him. The King of Navarre is the dupe of his royal brother, and will unwittingly increase the risk, if not precipitate the fate of his new-found cousin, in the wild scheme he has devised for her flight. Catherine de Medicis is occupied with her own dark designs. But she will not interfere with, if she declines to forward, those of her son. An hour hence the Louvre may be the scene of fiercest strife. But an hour hence it may be too late to save the Princess from dishonour.”

“ And your life will be the sacrifice of your devotion ?” said Esclairmonde. “ No, I will rather return to the banquet, and place myself under the protection of Henri of Navarre.”

“ He is unable to protect you,” replied Crichton. “ Fear nothing for me.”

"Why should not you accompany the Princess, Chevalier Crichton?" asked the Preacher.

"Question me not, but go," replied Crichton, hastily: "her life—her honour is endangered by this delay."

"I will not consent to your destruction," said Esclairmonde, passionately.

"You destroy me by remaining," rejoined Crichton: "a moment more, and it may be too late."

As he spoke, the iron door revolved upon its hinges, and a huissier bearing a flambeau, entered the cell, and in a loud voice announced "the King."

Accompanied by Marguerite de Valois, Henri III. immediately followed this announcement. A malicious smile played upon the features of the monarch, as he noticed the dismay of the group at his appearance.

"You were right in your conjectures, my sister," said he, turning to the Queen of Navarre; "our stray turtle-doves *have* flown

hither. The prison of a Huguenot is as favourable, we find, to the assignations of love as the bower of a Phryne. Messire Florent Chrétien might, perhaps, have found fitter occupation for his latest moments than to assist at such a rendezvous. But it is quite in character with his doctrines. His meditations, however, shall not be longer disturbed. The damps of this cell strike chilly on our senses after the perfumed atmosphere we have quitted. Princess of Condé," continued he, advancing towards Esclairmonde, who recoiled at his approach, "the masque claims your presence."

"Sire," replied the Princess, firmly, "I will rather remain a captive for life within this dungeon than return to your polluted halls."

"Obey him," whispered Crichton; "I may yet be able to deliver you from this perilous strait."

"Our attendants are at hand, fair cousin," said the king, significantly; "we neither

mean to detain you as a prisoner, nor to endanger our own health by longer continuance in this unwholesome vault."

"Go, my daughter," said Chrétien, "the power that watches over innocence will protect you. Fear nothing."

"Your hand, fair cousin," said Henri, impatiently.

"Your majesty will not refuse to conduct me to the King of Navarre?" said Esclairmonde, reluctantly complying with the monarch's request.

"Of a surety not," rejoined Henri, smiling; "but you will find him so completely engrossed by the languishing regards of La Rebours, that he will scarcely desire your company."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Princess, starting.

"Chevalier Crichton," said Henri, pausing, "you have disobeyed our injunctions. Henceforth you are banished from our presence."

“ Henri,” interposed Marguerite de Valois, “for my sake overlook his fault.”

“ For *your* sake, Marguerite!” returned the king in surprise; “a moment since and you would have changed his banishment to death,”

“ Tax me with inconsistency if you will. But grant my request.”

“ *Souvent femme varie,*” returned Henri, laughing; “be it as you please. To banish him from our revel might tend to throw a shade over its gaiety. Retain him by your side—and we are content. Allons.”

“ Marguerite,” said Crichton, as the Queen of Navarre took his arm, “your generosity has saved your brother’s crown.”

“ If it has revived your love I am satisfied,” returned Marguerite, tenderly.

“ You may revive it, my queen,” said Crichton.

“ In what way?” demanded Marguerite, trembling with eagerness.—“ But I can guess. You require my assistance to free the Princess

of Condé from her present danger. You shall have it."

"Your's is a noble heart, Marguerite."

"It is a faithful and a fond one, Crichton. Trifle not with its tenderness."

"If I survive this night, my life is yours."

"Survive it, Crichton!—what mean you?"

"I am half distracted, Marguerite. But linger not. Henri is already gone."

"And Esclairmonde," added the Queen, with a look of jealous reproach.

Many minutes had not elapsed after their departure, when Chrétien, who had again addressed himself to his devotions, was aroused by the harsh voice of the hooded official who commanded him to arise. The good man instantly obeyed. The cell was filled with a crowd of figures in sable robes and masks.

"Thy last hour is come," said the official.

"I am prepared," returned Chrétien in a firm tone. "Lead me forth."

While the hands of the preacher were

bound together, the voice of a priest, who formed one of the dismal group, thundered forth the following psalm :—“ *Exurge, quare obdormis Domine? exurge, et ne repellas in finem: quare faciem tuam avertis? oblivisceris tribulationem nostram: adhaesit in terra venter noster: exurge, Domine, adjuva nos, et libera nos.*”

Chrétien was then conducted through a variety of intricate passages to the edge of the Seine, now lighted up by the lurid glare of the torches borne by the expectant crowds on the other side of the river, and being placed in a bark was rowed swiftly over to the Prés-aux-clercs, where a fierce shout of exultation welcomed his arrival.

“ Kindle the pile,” shouted a thousand voices ; “ let the heretic die ! ”

“ We are starved to death,” cried the Sorbonist, “ and want a fire to warm us—to the stake—quick—quick ! ”

Death to the Huguenot!—fagot and flame!
Death to the Huguenot!—torture and shame!”

The red glare which shortly afterwards tinged the inky waters of the Seine was the reflection of Chrétien's funeral pyre.

CHAPTER II.

THE CONSPIRACY.

Dis-moi, mon maître, comment crois-tu que finira cet imbroglio ?

L. VITET. *Les Barricades.*

WHEN the royal party returned to the masque the festivity of the evening was at its height. The music was breathing its softest strains — the cavaliers were whispering their most impassioned love-speeches — the dames were making their tenderest responses. The universal freedom that prevailed gave the revel somewhat of the character of an orgie. Esclairmonde shrunk

back as she beheld the licence of the scene, and would have retreated, had retreat been possible. But Henri hurried her quickly onwards.

“ The King of Navarre is seated near yon beaufet,” said he; “ his right hand grasps a goblet, while his left is passed around the waist of his mistress. We shall be rather in the way. No matter. I am ready to commit you to his care.”

Esclairmonde hesitated.

“ At all events we had better wait till he has finished his song,” continued Henri; “ for it is evident from his gestures that he is pouring forth his passion in verse. In the meantime, you will oblige us by resuming your mask, fair cousin.”

As the princess complied with the monarch’s request, Henri of Navarre arose. Taking the hand of his partner, he hastened to join the dancers, and was quickly lost to view.

“ You must, perforce, remain with me a few moments longer,” said Henri; “ let us

take our station within yon embrasure, whence we can command the room, and as soon as the bramble is ended, I will summon the Béarnais to our presence."

Esclairmonde suffered herself to be led towards the window. As they proceeded thither, Henri ventured to take her hand within his own.

"Sire," said she, gently endeavouring to withdraw it from his grasp, "I will only consent to remain with you, on the condition that you do not renew the suit which has hitherto so much distressed me."

"Your condition is a hard one, fair cousin, but I will strive to obey you."

The princess looked around for Crichton. Amid the crowd of gay masks, however, that surrounded her, she could not discern his stately figure, or that of Marguerite de Valois.

"He has left me," she mentally ejaculated; "that royal syren has regained all her influence over his soul."

Henri divined her thoughts.

"Our sister has imposed no such condition on her lover as you would impose on us, fair cousin," said he. "Their quarrel is evidently arranged, and he is restored to his old place in her affections."

"Sire!"

"They have disappeared. Shall we pay another visit to the oratory?"

"Suffer me to join the Queen-Mother, Sire. I perceive her Majesty in the further salon conversing with the Duc de Nevers."

"With De Nevers," repeated Henri, angrily. "No, ma mie, we cannot part with you thus. We have a word or two to say respecting this Admirable Scot. A little more this way, fair coz. We would not be overheard. What if we tell you that Crichton's life hangs on your compliance."

"His life, Sire," gasped Esclairmonde.

"Your hand alone can arrest the sword that trembles o'er his head."

"You terrify me, Sire."

"I would not do so, mignonne," replied

Henri ; “on the contrary, I wish to re-assure you. Princess,” added he, passionately, “it is in your power to save him.”

“I understand your Majesty,” said Esclairmonde, coldly.

“Not entirely,” returned the King; “you may divine my motive, but you scarcely, I think, foresee the proposal I am about to make to you. I must premise by recounting the history of my earliest amourette. Renée de Rieux, my first mistress, before I beheld her, had disposed of her heart to Philippe Altoviti.”

“Spare me this recital, Sire.”

“She is now his consort. You love the Chevalier Crichton. On the same terms you shall be his bride.”

“I am the daughter of Louis of Bourbon, Sire.”

“The chevalier Crichton shall be a peer of France.”

“Were the King of France to sue for my hand I would refuse him,” replied Esclair-

monde, haughtily: “let him seek out his minions among those complaisant dames, who because he *is* a king, have nothing to refuse him.”

“ You have sealed your lover’s fate, fair cousin,” rejoined Henri. “ Du Halde,” added he, motioning to the chief-valet, “ bid the Duc de Nevers attend us.”

“ Sire,” said Esclairmonde, becoming pale as death, but speaking in a firm tone, “ take heed how you proceed to extremities. I am a woman, and a threat from me may weigh little with your Majesty. But, if from mere jealous anger, and on no just ground, you adjudge a knight, loyal and true as Crichton, to a shameful death, such vengeance as one of my sex *may* take, I will have. Look to it, Sire. My threat is neither an idle, nor a light one.”

“ Par la Mort dieu ! ” exclaimed Henri, “ if I had entertained any doubts as to your origin, fair cousin, the spirit you have just displayed would have removed them. The fire of the old Bourbons is not extinct. I

accept your defiance. Crichton dies— or you are mine. Decide, for here comes his executioner."

" I answer, as the Chevalier Crichton would have answered," replied Esclairmonde, " Death rather than dishonour."

Whatever reply Henri meditated was cut short by a merry peal of laughter from a party of frolic dames, who occupied a fauteuil near them, and a voice (it was that of the Abbé de Brantôme) was heard warbling the following ditty, which produced a very edifying effect upon the fair auditors.

Lobe's Homily.

SAINT AUGUSTIN, one day, in a fair maiden's presence,
Declared that pure love of the soul is the essence ;
And that faith, be it ever so firm and potential,
If love be not its base, will prove un-influential.

SAINT BERNARD, likewise, has a homily left us—
(Sole remnant of those, of which fate hath bereft us !)
Where the good Saint confers, without any restriction,
On those who love most, his entire benediction.

SAINT AMBROSE, again, in his treatise, "*De Virgine*,"
To love one another is constantly urging ye ;
And a chapter he adds, where he curses—not blesses—
The ill-fated wight, who no mistress possesses !
Wise DE LYRA, hereon, makes this just observation,
That the way to the heart is the way to salvation ;
And the farther from love—we're the nearer damnation !

Besides, as remarks this profound theologian,
(Who was perfectly versed in the doctrine Ambrogian)—
He, who loves not, is worse than the infamous set
ye call
Profane, unbelieving, schismatic, heretical ;
For, if he the fire of one region should smother,
He is sure to be scorch'd by the flames of the other !
And this is the reason, perhaps, why SAINT GREGORY
(The Pope, who reduced the stout Arians to beggary !)
Averr'd—(keep this counsel for-ever before ye)
That the lover, on earth, hath his sole purgatory !

Pæroration.

LET your minds then be wrapp'd in devout contemplation
Of the precepts convey'd by this grave exhortation :
Be loving, beloved, and never leave off—it's
The way to fulfil both the law and the prophets !

We will now return to Crichton. Upon entering the grand salon the Scot detached himself from Marguerite de Valois, and, hastily resuming his mask, proceeded with a swift step in the direction of the Queen-mother. Catherine, at that moment, was engaged in deep conference with the Duc de Nevers, and the Scot was enabled to approach her unperceived. Stationing himself behind a pillar, his quick ear failed not to catch each word of their discourse, though it was carried on, for the most part, in whispers.

“ And the Duc D’Anjou you say, Madame, alarmed at the discovery of his letter contained in the missal, has quitted the Louvre without striking a blow,” said De Nevers.

“ The moment I received your billet I despatched it to him by a faithful messenger,” returned Catherine. “ Apprehensive of discovery he fled.”

“ Confusion !” muttered the Duke ; “ his head was to have been the price of my lieu-

tenant-generalship. Henri will dare nothing against the Queen-Mother."

" You are thoughtful, monsieur le duc," said Catherine suspiciously.

" I am full of regret that our plot is defeated," replied De Nevers.

" It is not *utterly* defeated," answered the queen.

" Indeed!"

" What Anjou dared not do, I will execute alone."

" You, Madame?"

" Failing in my attempts upon the honesty of our incorruptible Scot, I have found a hand as sure as his, and less reluctant. Hold your partisans in readiness, De Nevers. Henri dies to-night."

" And your Majesty can fully rely upon the instrument of your will?"

" Fully," replied Catherine, " he is a Spanish bravo, accustomed to the use of the stiletto—and will not need to repeat the blow."

“ ‘Tis well,” rejoined the Duke—“ and the signal?”

“ Will be the King’s assassination,” said Catherine. “ Mark me, De Nevers. I will contrive that Henri and Crichton shall enter the oval chamber together. The assassin is already posted behind the arras. As the King passes he will strike. Do you and your attendants rush in at the cry, and despatch the Scot. Hew him down without mercy. Henri’s death will lie at his door.”

“ It shall be done, Madame.”

“ Ah ! here comes Du Halde. We must separate.”

Possessed of the plans of his enemies, Crichton hastened back to Marguerite de Valois, who awaited his return with impatience.

“ To the oval chamber, my queen,” said he, “ quick—quick.”

“ Wherefore?” demanded Marguerite.

“ Henri’s life is menaced by an assassin,”

replied Crichton. "I must seek him, and apprise him of his danger."

"Henri is there already," returned Marguerite. "He has this moment entered that chamber with Esclairmonde."

"Ha!" exclaimed Crichton, darting from her, "I may be too late to save him."

It will be necessary to return for a moment to the Princess of Condé. After rejecting Henri's proposal in the disdainful manner we have described, and in order to escape from his further assiduities, while he lent an attentive ear to Brantôme's homily, Esclairmonde retired into the embrasure, and throwing open the window, stepped forth upon the balcony. A terrible spectacle was presented to her view. In the midst of a bright and spiring flame which mounted high in the still air of night, brilliantly illuminating a confused mass of threatening figures, hung a black and shapeless object. The princess turned aside in horror. Just then a loud exulting roar arose from the multitude. The remains of the mar-

tyred Chrétien had dropped into the devouring element. Esclairmonde heard no more. She fell, without sense, into the arms of Henri, and, by his command, was instantly conveyed to the oval chamber.

When Crichton arrived at the doors of this chamber he found them closed. Two huissiers stationed before them peremptorily refused him admittance.

“Follow me,” said Marguerite de Valois, “I will show you a secret entrance to the room.”

Passing through a suite of apartments with the rapidity of thought, Crichton and the Queen reached a small anti-chamber, in the corner of which a suite of tapestry having been removed by Marguerite, a masked door was disclosed. Another valve admitted them to the oval chamber.

“Help!” exclaimed Henri, who, pursued by Caravaja with a drawn dagger in his hand, flew in the direction of the sound, “an assassin! help!”

“ Sangre di Dios ! I have missed my first blow,” cried the Spaniard, catching hold of Henri’s mantle—“ but this shall find the way to thy heart, tyrant.”

“ Mercy ! ” ejaculated Henri.

“ Die ! ” cried Caravaja, raising his knife. But as he uttered the exclamation the sword of Crichton passed through his body, and he fell heavily upon the person of the king, which he deluged with his blood.

“ Crichton ! ” exclaimed Esclairmonde, aroused from her insensibility by Henri’s outcries, “ ah ! what do I behold ? —the king assassinated ! ”

“ No fair cousin,” replied Henri, extricating himself with difficulty from the gripe (which death had not relaxed) fixed by the Spaniard upon his cloak. “ The Virgin be praised, I have escaped without injury—though not without alarm. Chevalier Crichton let those doors be thrown open.”

To describe the confusion that ensued as this command was obeyed, and the monarch,

pale, trembling, and covered with blood, was revealed to the general gaze, would be impossible. By his side stood Crichton with his drawn sword in his hand, still giving ghastly evidence of the execution it had done. Amid the universal consternation that prevailed, the voice of the Duc de Nevers was heard exclaiming--“The king is wounded to the death—the assassin stands before us. It is Crichton. Slay him! Cut him in pieces!”

“Hold!” ejaculated the King, checking the movement of this faction, “I am unhurt. Messieurs,” continued he, addressing the guard, “we command you to attach the person of the Duc de Nevers, whom we accuse of lèze-majesté and treason—“Madame,” added he, turning to Catherine, “you will answer us on the same charges.”

“At once, and boldly, my son,” replied the Queen-Mother. “You are deceived. The sole traitor stands by your side. I will prove Chevalier Crichton guilty of the crimes you have imputed to me.”

"Let Cosmo Ruggieri stand forth," said Crichton.

At this summons the astrologer forced his way through the crowd.

"What hast thou to advance against me?" demanded the Queen, imperiously.

"That you have conspired against the life of the king your son, and against his crown," returned Ruggieri firmly; "and that the Duc de Nevers is your accomplice. Will your Majesty deign to regard this scroll?"

"It is thine own condemnation, Ruggieri," said Henri glancing at the document, "thou art deeply implicated in this conspiracy."

"I deny it not," replied the astrologer, "let equal justice be dealt upon all who have betrayed you."

"Ruggieri," said the king, "thy doom is the gallies. De Nevers shall lose his head. For you, Madame," added he, look-

ing at the Queen-Mother, “ we will reflect upon your sentence.”

“ I am content,” said Ruggieri, with a look of gratified revenge; “ one of these accursed Gonzagas will fall by my hands.”

“ Away with him,” said Henri. “ Chevalier Crichton,” added he, embracing the Scot, “ you are my preserver, and henceforth my brother.”

“ Sire !”

“ I have played the tyrant and the libertine long enough. I will now endeavour to assume the part of the generous monarch. The hand of the Princess of Condé is yours—ha ! what means this hesitation ?”

“ Sire ! a greater obstacle than you have raised divides us,” replied Crichton, “ our creeds are different.”

“ What of that ?” said Henri of Navarre, who had joined the group, “ Marguerite de Valois is a Catholic. I am a Protestant.”

"An excellent example, certes," said Chicot, screaming with laughter.

"There is one favour which you *can* confer Sire, and which I can accept," said Crichton.

"Name it."

"The freedom of the king of Navarre."

"It is granted," replied Henri, "on condition that he takes his queen with him."

"Excuse me, Sire," replied the Bourbon. "I have too much consideration to separate her from the Admirable Crichton. Fair Cousin of Condé, you will accompany me. His Majesty has promised you a fitting escort."

"I have," replied Henri, "But I would rather find her a fitting husband."

"Crichton," said Esclairmonde, blushingly turning towards her lover, "have I your dispensation if I break my vow."

"From the bottom of my heart," replied Crichton passionately. "And I begin to find I am not so stanch a Catholic as I fancied myself when I quitted Florent Chrétien's cell."

"I would be of any *creed* for the woman I love," said the Bourbon.

"And I," said Henri III.

"And I," added Crichton.

"Then no more need be said about the matter," cried Chicot." Let us send for a priest at once. He will remove every difficulty. Points of faith are easily settled where love plays the umpire."

THE END.

A P P E N D I X.

VOL. III. *Appendix. a*

Elegy;

ON THE

CARDINAL CARLO BORROMEO.*

I.

With black funeral robe, and tresses shorn,
 O'erwhelmed with grief, sad Elegy appears ;
 And, by her side, sits Ecloga forlorn,
 Blotting each line she traces with her tears.

II.

'Twas night !—long pondering on my secret woes,
 The third hour broke upon my vigil lone ;
 Far from my breast had sorrow chased repose,
 And fears presageful threatened ills unknown.

* The original poem will be found at p. xix of the Preface.

III.

Slumber, at length, my heavy eyelids sealed ;
The self-same terrors scared me as I slept :
Portentous dreams events to-come revealed,
And o'er my couch fantastic visions swept.

IV.

Upon the shoreless sea methought I sailed,
No helmsman steered the melancholy bark ;
Around its sides the pitying Nereids wailed,
Whitening with lucid arms the waters dark.

V.

Cydippe, dolphin-borne, Ephyra fair,
And Xanthia leave their halcyon-haunted caves,
With Doris and Cymodece to share
The maddening strife of storm-awaken'd waves.

VI.

Drawn, unresisting, where the whirling gyre
Vexes the deep, the ship her prow inclines ;
While, like a pharos' gleam, the lightning's fire
Over the raging vortex redly shines.

VII.

Mix'd with the thunder's roar that shakes the skies,
 Notus and Africus and Boreas sound ;
 Black wreathing clouds, like shadowy legions, rise,
 Shrouding the sea in midnight gloom profound.

VIII.

Disabled, straining, by the tempest lashed,
 Reft of her storm-tried helmsman's guiding hand,
 The vessel sinks !—amid the surges dashed,
 Vainly I struggle—vainly cry for land !

IX

Alas ! stern truths with dreams illusive meet !
 Latiум the shipwreck of her hopes deplores !
 The pious leader of the Insubrian fleet
 I mourn — a wandering Scot from Northern
 shores !

X.

Weep youths ! weep aged men ! weep ! rend your
 hair !
 Let your wild plaints be on the breezes tost !
 Weep virgins ! matrons ! till your loud despair
 Outbraves her children's wail for Ilion lost !

XI.

In that wreck'd bark the Ship of Christ behold !
 In its lost chief the Cardinal divine,
 Of princely Lombard race ;¹ whose worth untold
 Eclipsed the lofty honours of his line.

XII.

His suffering countrymen to rule, sustain,
 By the All-wise was BORROMEO given ;
 And he, who stoop'd not dignity to gain,²
 Derived his high investiture from heaven.

¹ Saint Carlo Borromeo was born at Arona, near the Lake Maggiore, the loveliest of Italian lakes, on the 2nd of October, 1538. His family was, and still continues to be, the most illustrious in Lombardy. It derives however its proudest distinction from its connection with the virtuous Cardinal and his exalted nephew Frederigo, whose sublime character has been of late so exquisitely portrayed by Manzoni. If ever man deserved canonization, it was the subject of this elegy, whose whole life was spent in practices of piety; and whose zeal, munificence, wisdom, toleration, and beneficence have conferred lasting benefits on his creed and country.

² He was made Cardinal and Archbishop in his twenty-third year by his uncle, Pius VI., who had resigned several rich livings to him twelve years before. EUSTACE. *Classical Tour through Italy.*

XIII.

Bright as the sun o'er all pre-eminent,
 Or Cynthia glittering from her star-girt throne,
 The saintly CHARLES, on truths sublime intent,
 Amid the purple hierarchy shone.

XIV.

The Christian Fleet, devoid of helm and sail,³
 He mann'd, and led where roughest billows roll :
 And, though no more, his virtues wide prevail,
 Their sacred influence spreads from pole to pole.

XV.

His, was the providence that all foresees,
 His, the trust placed, unchangeably, above ;
 His, strict observance of his sires' decrees,
 Rapt adoration, and fear-chasten'd love.

³ Borromeo found the diocese of Milan in the most deplorable state of disorder. But with a vigorous and unsparing hand he reformed all ecclesiastical abuses—"C'est ainsi," observes M. Tabauraud, the writer of his life in the *Biog. Universelle*, "que l'Eglise de Milan, tombée dans une espèce d'anarchie depuis quatre-vingts ans que ses archevêques n'y résidaient pas, reçut en peu d'années cette forme admirable, qui, par la vie toute angélique de son clergé, la rendit le modèle de toutes les autres Eglises. Tant de réformes ne purent se faire sans de grands obstacles, qu'il surmonta par sa fermeté, sa patience, et son imperturbable charité."

XVI.

The faith in practice, not profession, shown,
 Which borrows all its glory from on high
 Was his :—nor did his holiness, alone,
 Consist in outward forms of sanctity.

XVII.

A willing ear unto the nobly-born,
 Nobler himself, he ne'er refused to yield ;
 Nor, Jesus' meek disciple, did he scorn
 The humble prayer that to his heart appealed.⁴

XVIII.

Can no remembrance dearer than his name
 Bequeathed us, link his memory with the earth :
 Nor can my praise add lustre to his fame—
 Proud heritage of unexampled worth !⁵

⁴ So unbounded was Borromeo's charity, that he sold his principality of Oria, and distributed the proceeds amongst the poor.

⁵ The private virtues of Saint Charles, that is, the qualities which give true sterling value to the man, and sanctify him to the eyes of his Creator, I mean humility, self-command, temperance, industry, prudence, and fortitude, were not inferior to his public endowments. His table was for his

XIX.

'When o'er his desolated city fell
 The livid plague's inexorable breath ;
 Oft, in the lazaretto's tainted cell,
 Fervent, he prayed beside the couch of death.⁶

XX.

As through the fane the pale procession swept,⁷
 Before its shrine he bent in lowliest wise ;
 Imploring heaven, in mercy, to accept
 His life, for them, a willing sacrifice.

guests ; his own diet was confined to bread and vegetables ; he allowed himself no amusement or relaxation, alleging that the variety of his duties was in itself a sufficient recreation. His dress and establishment were such as became his rank, but in private he dispensed with the attendance of servants, and wore an under dress coarse and common ; his bed was of straw ; his repose short ; and in all the details of life he manifested an utter contempt of personal ease and indulgence.

EUSTACE.

• During a destructive pestilence he erected a lazaretto, and served the forsaken victims with his own hands.

EUSTACE.

• The incidents described in this and the following stanza, do not occur in the original. As, however, they appear necessary to complete the picture of the holy Primate's career presented by the poem, I have ventured upon their introduction. These actions, as well as his heroic devotion to the plague-stricken in the lazaretto, mentioned in the pre-

XXI.

When from the assassin's arm the bullet sped,
 He blench'd not, nor his deep devotions stopt;
 "Be not dismay'd in heart!"—the anthem said,
 He rose—the bullet from his vestment dropt!*

ceding verse, form subjects for part of the eight magnificent silver bas-reliefs, which adorn the vaulted roof of the gorgeous subterranean chapel in the Duomo at Milan, where the body of the Saint reposes, enshrined amid "barbaric pearl and gold." During the period of the plague, Borromeo was indefatigable in his exertions to arrest the terrible calamity—"Cherchant," says M. Tabauraud, "à desarmer la colère du ciel par des processions générales, auxquelles il assistait nu-pieds, la corde au cou, les yeux fixés sur son crucifix, qu'il arrosoit de ses larmes, *en s'offrant à Dieu comme une victime de propitiation pour les péchés de son peuple!*"

* The ecclesiastical reformation effected by Saint Charles met, as was natural, with considerable opposition on the part of the corrupt and disorderly priesthood, and he became the object of their bitterest animosity. "Les plus opposés à la réforme," writes M. Tabauraud—"suscitèrent un fière Farina, qui se posta à l'entrée de la chapelle archiépiscopale, où le S. Prélat faisait sa prière avec toute sa maison; et, au moment où l'on chantait cette antienne: *Non turbetur cor vestrum neque formidet*, l'assassin, éloigné seulement de cinq ou six pas, tire un coup d'arquebuse sur S. Charles, à genoux devant l'autel. A ce bruit, le chant cesse, la consternation est générale, le Saint, sans s'émouvoir, fait signe de continuer la prière: il se croyoit cependant blessé mortellement, et offrait à Dieu le sacrifice de sa vie. *La prière finie, il se relève, et voit tomber à ses pieds la balle qu'on lui avoit tirée-*

XXII.

Not in the prism more varied hues reside,
 Than bright examples in his course are traced:—
 Alas ! his longer sojourn here denied,
 His guiding star is from its sphere effaced.

XXIII.

Alas ! life's ebbing tide no hindrance knows !
 With man is nothing certain but to die !
 Mortality, alone, presents a close
 Immutable, 'mid mutability.

XXIV.

As, in some stream remote, the swan expires,
 Breathing, unheard, her fate-foreboding strain,
 So the declining Cardinal retires
 To steep Varalla's solitary fane.⁹

dans le dos, et qui n'avait fait qu'effleurer son rocher. Biog. UNIVERSELLE. The holy primate endeavoured, ineffectually, to preserve Farina and the instigators of his crime from the punishment they merited. They were put to death, and Pius VI. dissolved the order (*Gli Umili*) to which they belonged.

⁹ The Monastery of Monte Varalla is situated in the Piedmontese states, near the banks of the Sesia. Thither Saint Charles retired immediately previous to his dissolution, attended only by his confessor, the Jesuit Adorno—

XXV.

Like the fair flower that springs from winter's crust,
Lombards! your Primate bursts his earthly
chains;
And, in his Father's mansion with the Just,
A portion and inheritance obtains.¹⁰

and returned thence to Milan in a dying state. “Franciscum Adornum Societatis Jesu plurimi fecit qui cum in extremo vitæ curriculo per dies plurimos, quo tempore in Monte Varallo meditationibus se totum tradiderat CAROLUS ab ejus latere nunquam discesserit.” *Caroli Cardin. Borromœi Vita—Valerio. ANTOINE GODEAU Bishop of Grasse*, who has written the life of the illustrious Primate, gives the following particulars of his melancholy visit to the Monastery. “Encore que tout la vie de SAINT CHARLES fust une retraite mentale, toutefois il avoit accoutumé, d'en faire une locale tous les ans en quelque monastère écarté, où il employoit quelques jours pour faire une revue sévère de sa vie, et pour prendre un nouvel esprit de zèle et de piété Avant que de s'en retourner à Milan, il voulut passer au Mont Varalle dont nous avons parlé et y faire ses exercices.” *Vie de S. Ch. Borromée. Liv. II. Ch. dernier. M. MELLIN*, in his *Voyage dans le Milanais*, describing the mountain oratory of Varese, observes, “on va de là à Varalle, où les histoires de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament sont figurées dans cinquante-deux chapelles.”

¹⁰ The earthly pilgrimage of Saint Charles terminated on the 4th of November, 1584, at the age of forty-six years. He was canonized by Paul V. in 1610.

XXVI.

Within his chosen tomb calm may he sleep ! ¹¹

Beatified, aloft, his spirit soars !

While Virtue's loss irreparable, deep,

With reverential grief the Muse deplores.

¹¹ "Cupiens hoc loco sibi monumentum vivens elegit."—
Epitaph inscribed upon Borromeo's tomb by his own desire.

To Gaspar Visconti.*

I.

WHEN her fair land with grief o'erspread,
Insubria mourn'd her Primate dead ;
When BORROMEO to the tomb
Was borne 'mid all-pervading gloom ;
When dimm'd with tears was every eye,
When breathed one universal sigh
The sorrowing lyre for him who slept,
I first—a Scottish minstrel—swept.

II.

The night is pass'd, and dawn awakes,
Bright Cynthius through the vapour breaks,
And Lucifer, with cheering beams,
From out his golden axle gleams.

* The original poem will be found at p. xxv in the Preface.

Where late upon the raging sea
The wild winds rush'd tumultuously ;
And the frail bark by surges tost,
Her tempest-braving helmsman lost,
Her timbers strain'd, her canvass riven,
Wide o'er the weltering waste was driven ;
While her pale crew, with fear aghast,
Gazed (as they deem'd) on heaven their last !
With shrieks their hapless fate bewailing !—
With prayers the threatening skies assailing !—
— A change is wrought !—hushed are the gales,
A soft and summer calm prevails ;
And the glad ship, in safety, glides
Over the gently-rolling tides.
In troops o'er ocean's broad expanse,
Day's rosy harbingers advancee ;
Bland Eolus careers the wave,
Fierce Notus hurries to his cave ;
Young Titan from the waters springs,
With new-born lustre on his wings ;
And over all things shines that sun,
Whose light a thousand vows have won.

III.

Iö ! with shouts the decks resound !
Iö ! another chief is found !
Another leader hath been sent
To rule the Christian armament ;
Whose firmness and undaunted zeal
Ensure uninterrupted weal :
Whose voice the Roman Rota sway'd,
Whose laws that synod sage obey'd ;
Whose hand will guide, with equal ease,
Religion's bark through stormy seas :
Whose power in exhortation shewn,
Whose wisdom, I myself have known ;
When by his eloquence subdued,
In admiration lost, I stood.
Rejoice, thrice-happy Lombardy !
That such a chief is given to thee !
A chief so free from aught of sin,
Virtue might be his origin :
Whose heavenly purpose, onward-tending,
Whose resolution calm, unbending,
Shall lead thee through the shades of night
To realms of everlasting light.

IV.

Haste Milanese ! your Primate greet !
Prelates ! your leader fly to meet !
Run maidens ! youths ! let each one bring
Some gift, some worthy offering !
Surrounding nations hail your choice,
Surrounding nations loud rejoice :
Like him, whom ye have lost, was none
Save him your choice has fall'n upon !

V.

A father fond, a ruler wise,
GASPAR, in thee, we recognize :
Thy name, **VISCONTI**, seems to be
An earnest of prosperity.
To us thou art in our distress,
As manna in the wilderness.
Inhospitable Caucasus,
Sarmatian Boreas rigorous,
Seize on the caitiff, who denies
Thy all-acknowledg'd charities !
A glory art thou, and a star,
.A light, a pharos seen afar !

And, clothed with majesty divine,
Shalt prove the pillar of thy line.
High rectitude, and prescience
Are thine, and wide beneficence ;
A Numa in thy sanctity,
A Cato in thy gravity,
A Augustus in nobility !
Hence the High Pontiff **GREGORY**,^{*}
Who holds of Paradise the key,
For thee earth's chains hath cast aside,
For thee heaven's gate hath opened wide ;
Milan's white robe hath round thee spread,
Her mitre placed upon thy head.

VI.

In thy blest advent all men see
Of peace a certain augury ;
All tongues are clamorous in thy praise,
All prayers are for thy length of days.
Amid the crowd I, CRICTON, born
On Caledonian shores forlorn,

* Gregory XIII., the Pope by whom Gaspar Visconti was appointed to the Archiepiscopal see of Milan.

Not all unknown, congratulate
Thee, GASPAR, on thine honour'd state.
Perpetual happiness be thine !
Thy bright, approving smile be mine !
Nor let thy taste, severe, disdain,
Primate, this welcome-breathing strain.

